

REVEALED! Unreal Championship (Xbox) & Smuggler's Run 2 (PS2)

Lifecycle 2 Vol3 #7 07/01

Next Generation Magazine

Next Gen

From the creators of
CRASH BANDICOOT comes...

Jak and Daxter

The Precursor Legacy

Are these
PS2's next
superstars?

THE DEFINITIVE
**GAME BOY
ADVANCE**
LAUNCH GUIDE

BEST E3 EVER!

THE COMPLETE REPORT:

- XBOX & GAMECUBE LAUNCH INFO
- PS2 GOES ONLINE
- AWESOME NEW PC GAMES

REVIEWED:

GRAN TURISMO 3
RED FACTION
TRIBES 2
MYST III
ILLBLEED

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MEDIA WITH PASSION



PlayStation 2 ■ PC ■ N64 ■ GameCube ■ Xbox ■ Dreamcast

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EDITORIAL

Lucky #7



Seven certainly was a lucky number for the Electronic Entertainment Expo (E3). In its seventh year, it was without question the best E3 ever. Just as interesting was the variety of opinions expressed by show attendees. Some picked Nintendo as the big winner, some Sony, and some (but not as many) Microsoft. In fact, excellent games were available for every platform, and each system really played to its strengths.

The PC games were fewer in number, but often wildly innovative in design. Nintendo's GameCube library offered the most family-friendly titles, while Sony's PS2 had the market cornered on hip, must-have action titles. Microsoft's offerings pretty much aimed for the same tone and audience as Sony, only coming up short in the "must-have" category. Still, considering Microsoft started from zero and has come so far in the past year, Nintendo and Sony still have plenty to worry about from Xbox. No matter which console is your favorite, one thing remains clear: This three-horse race will run long past the fall launch of GameCube and Xbox. The first-place winner will likely be decided years from now, not this winter.

And never has our staff come away from E3 so enthused with what the game industry had to offer. We can't wait to share the details with you. Just turn the page...

Tom
— Tom Russo



Finals

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Game industry news and analysis



■ THE HIGH TIMES AND THE LOW DOWN

E3 2001: An industry reborn

There has never been a better time to be a gamer — ever

→ Once a year the entire videogame industry gathers in one place to hawk its wares to retailers, do the meet-and-greet, show off its stuff to the press, and throw as many parties in three days as humanly possible. This is the sum of the Electronic Entertainment Expo, and as you might guess, every year there is a pre-show buzz, as well as industry-wide expect-

tations going in of what will be the next big thing, and which of the hardware companies is going to "win."

Expectations were especially high this year, with both industry veteran Nintendo and upstart Microsoft officially showing off their new consoles to U.S. audiences. Having not one but two new consoles at the same E3 is unprecedented. Also, with the industry still reeling from

the general economy's high-tech stock slump and smaller-than-expected revenues over the past holiday season, the stakes seemed even higher — it was hard not to notice the surprising amount of unused space on the show floor, with a number of companies deciding to forego the expense of a booth.

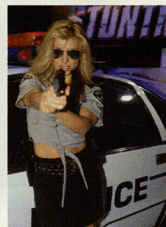
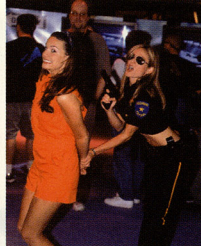
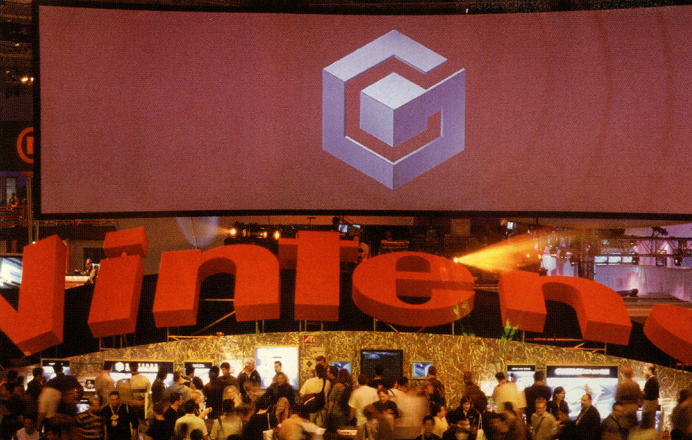
However, by show's end the real story wasn't the

hardware. At E3 2001, software took center stage.

In an era of belt-tightening and uncertain corporate futures, the industry has responded not by falling back and playing it safe, but by continuing to innovate and simply making great games. At every booth, on every screen, the level of quality was astounding, from the ambition of *Star Wars Galaxies*, to the unique

camera perspectives and gameplay of *Max Payne*, to the trailer for *Silent Hill 2* — a game so genuinely frightening and disturbing that Konami very nearly didn't show it.

One could argue, in fact, that on the hardware front, none of the console companies made a standout showing. Microsoft's initially sure-footed rise to the top



has been hampered of late by everything from grumbling complaints about the "big" Xbox controller to the more serious lack of any obvious killer app.

Nintendo seemed comfortably smug, since it's a given that Game Boy Advance has the handheld market to itself, and that even without a *Mario* or a *Zelda* at launch, GameCube will sell nicely on the

Nintendo brand alone. And it didn't matter that *Luigi's Mansion* seemed uninvolved, that *Wave Race Blue Storm* looked a lot like *Wave Race 64*, or that *Metroid* was completely absent; the solid mass of people crammed into the mostly enclosed space of the Nintendo booth every day from show open to close didn't seem to notice.

Likewise, Sony found the

knack for succeeding in spite of itself. Sony's overlong press conference was littered with bizarre claims — for example, that PlayStation was solely responsible for popularizing the CD-ROM format, and that PS2 really isn't hard to develop for (only to have every developer who went onstage to demo a game essentially say, "It was hard getting this to work, but...").

Yet Sony arguably came out ahead where it counts: the games. The second generation of PS2 software is vastly superior to last year's, though all three systems boasted lineups that included interesting, gorgeous titles. Perhaps the even bigger winner, however, was PC — a format that many had labeled as all but dead but that carried a disproportionate number of

the best games on view.

By show's end, attendees were nothing short of jubilant, if exhausted. Perhaps never before had so many fine games been in one place. Whatever troubles may have plagued the industry last year, as a whole it has clearly risen to the challenge. Simply put, this is a great time to be a gamer. — Jeff Lundrigan

■ ALL GAMES, ALL THE TIME

GameCube to arrive on November 5

Nintendo stacks the deck with classic characters and a \$199 price point

➔ "Let me introduce you to our new baby," said Shigeru Miyamoto of GameCube. "Like all babies, it's small but it will make a lot of noise."

The legendary Nintendo game designer was playing to a packed house (bigger than Microsoft's, but smaller than Sony's) crowded into the Biltmore Hotel for Nintendo's pre-E3 press conference. After more than a year of rumors and speculation, Nintendo finally revealed playable GameCube software — and it was worth the wait. The company announced

■ Satoru Iwata spoke of the "Nintendo Difference," which stresses gameplay over technology



several titles in development: *Luigi's Mansion*, *Pikmin*, *Super Smash Bros. Melee*, *Star Fox Adventures*, *Dinosaur Planet*, *Animal Forest*, *Disney's Mickey, Donkey Kong Racing*, *Eternal Darkness*, *Kameo*, *The Legend of Zelda*, *Mario Kart*, *Metroid Prime*, *NBA Courtside 2002*, *Raven Blade*, and *Wave Race Blue Storm*. Of these, six will be ready for the Nov. 5, 2001 North American launch.

Nintendo also revealed a second GameCube from Panasonic that will play DVD movies, but will ship only in Japan. Missing from the press conference was any mention of GameCube's \$199.95 price point, which Nintendo announced on

the graphical power of the system. Miyamoto also used the game to demonstrate the intricacies of the GameCube controller, which on the whole was very well received by show attendees. A new game in development by Miyamoto, *Pikmin*, combined the character elements of *Oddworld* with real-time-strategy gameplay. Although it seemed a little early, *Pikmin* captured the attention of many attendees.

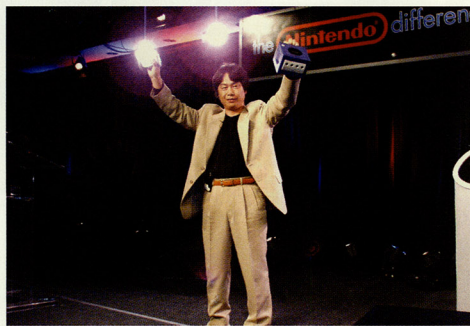
While the graphics were certainly competitive with the games on other systems, Iwata insisted it is the creative gameplay that is the key to differentiating Nintendo's games from its competitors. "I've been developing games for more than 20 years," he

says, "so if I put an N64 game and GameCube game next to each other, I can see the difference. But my wife wouldn't see much difference."

Oddly, the GameCube launch game most likely to sell systems to older gamers, *Star Wars Rogue Leader: Rogue Squadron II*, was shown for only a few moments during the gameplay video at Nintendo's press event. But on the show floor, you couldn't even get near it because of the crowds. And aside from *Eternal Darkness*, titles that will appeal to older gamers were conspicuously missing, proving once again that Nintendo is obviously attempting to secure its iron-grip on the younger market. — Kevin Toyama

MISSING IN ACTION

Nintendo's booth showcased a ton of playable GameCube games, but a few were conspicuously absent — most notably *Metroid*, which was nowhere to be seen, even behind closed doors. They did show an impressive 15-second teaser video for the game, but it appeared to be entirely F&V and ran at a very slow framerate. *Zelda* was also missing, except for a short video at the Nintendo press conference. Even there, however, it was the same footage we saw last year at Spaceworld. We're hoping we'll see these titles, along with the new *Mario* game, at Spaceworld this August.



■ Shigeru Miyamoto took center stage as he presented GameCube



■ A confident Sony President Kaz Hirai says the question is, "Who's going to be number two?"

■ NOW DIALING IN

Sony Reveals Online Strategy

No price drop planned this year

➔ Sony's online plan became clearer at its marathon two-hour press conference, as it revealed relationships with just about every leading Internet-related company not called Microsoft. The company back-peddled away from its broadband-only plans, announcing that it has partnered with RealNetworks' RealPlayer 8 for streaming media, Macromedia for Flash compatibility, Cisco for IP software developed specifically for PlayStation 2, and, from an earlier announcement, AOL for instant messaging, chat, and email on PS2. Tying all this

together will be Sony's network adapter coming in November for \$39.95, which allows PS2 to connect with CATV and DSL through Ethernet as well as analog phone lines. A 40GB hard drive is also coming in November.

Far more encouraging than these dot-com partnerships, however, was the presentation of strong second-generation content. *Final Fantasy X*, *Metal Gear Solid 2*, *Silent Hill 2*, *Devil May Cry*, and this month's cover story, *Jak and Daxter*, proved Sony will have enough compelling content to weather

■ THE SLEEPING GIANT AWAKENS

Countdown to Xbox Launch

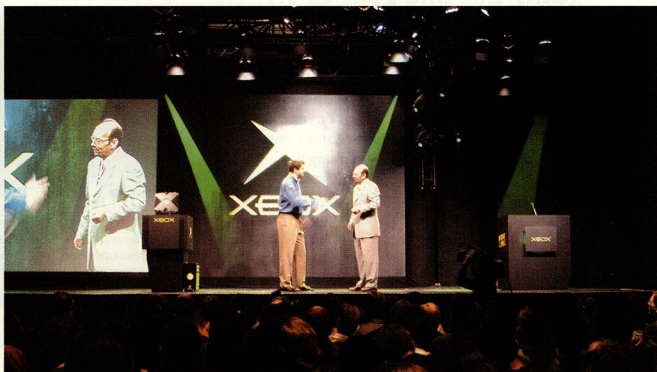
On November 8, Microsoft's Xbox will cost \$299. But is there a game that will make you buy the system?



→ It's May 16, the morning of the day before E3, and Chief Xbox Officer Robbie Bach steps before a packed audience of groggy journalists, retailers, and developers (it was 8 a.m.) and reveals a finalized, working Xbox machine — with a release date of Nov. 8 and a launch price of \$299. Bach also announces the company's intention to have between 600,000 to 800,000 units available on the day of launch with a steady stream of new units to come (totaling one million) in the weeks before Christmas. Unfortunately, Bach's coup de grace, the act of booting up the final production unit, was marred by some technical glitches in the A/V system. This combination of revelation and flawed presentation would come to define Microsoft's presence

at the show. There were certainly some moments of triumph, but not everything was working as well as it could have.

Still, for a company that didn't have a single Xbox game to show at last E3, Microsoft had undeniably come a long way toward proving its credibility in the face of its more established competition. Most important to the overall formula were the playable games in Microsoft's booth and in various third-party booths around the show floor. The new in-game demo of *Dead or Alive 3* featured mindblowing graphics, and other games on the show floor (including *Test Drive*, *Jet Set Radio Future*, *Unreal Championship*, and *Blood Wake*) clearly demonstrated the potential of the new console. Microsoft is certainly making every attempt



■ *Project Gotham* (left) is Microsoft's answer to Sony's *GT3*; Chief Xbox Officer Robbie Bach welcomes Sega President Peter Moore (top); *Blood Wake* may be Xbox's sleeper hit (below)

to partner with major players. Steven Spielberg appeared via video to promote Microsoft's exclusive deal for games based on his new mega-project, A.I. But the biggest game-related announcement actually came from Capcom, which has jumped on board the Xbox train with three exclusives, *Dino Crisis 3*, *Genma Onimusha* (an enhanced version of the PS2 titles), and a new Shinji Mikami-driven project code-named *Brain Box*.

While most of the games were competent, it was hard to spot any real system sellers. Many of the titles, like *Halo* and *Madden*, were early in development



and were plagued with noticeable slowdown. Not unlike the launch of PlayStation 2, it may be that the best stuff shows up a year or two later. Finally, the lack of any solid online plan also looked bad, despite the fact that several systems could be hooked together to form a LAN.

Overall, Microsoft has gained the industry mind-share it needs to be a player in the console industry. The question still looming is, will the right games be ready at launch to win a significant enough portion of the public marketshare? As of E3, that's still unresolved. — Blake Fischer

Xbox and GameCube launch in November. "We have no plans to reduce our price [pre-Xbox and GameCube launch]," Sony Senior VP Jack Tretton told Next Gen in a private interview. "I think we could sell every unit we manufacture this year at \$299 without any problem. Regardless of what our competitors are going to do in terms of pricing and release dates, that doesn't change our strategy."

— Kevin Toyama



■ *SOCOM: U.S. Navy SEALs* (left) and *Silent Hill 2* are big titles for PS2

The 10 Best Games of E3

(Only this one goes to II)

There were so many great games at E3 this year — some behind closed doors — that we had no choice but to cheat and expand this list out to II. That meant we also had to make some pretty strict rules about what we would and wouldn't include. Games only made the cut if we saw them running live. Therefore, no "on videotape only" games qualified. Surprisingly, although this was a show dominated by console announcements, eight of our choices made their debut on PC. Go figure.

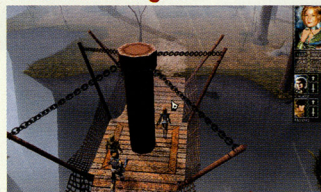
Max Payne



■ Platform: **PC**
■ Publisher: **G.O.D. Games** ■ Developer: **Remedy**

High-intensity, two-fisted gunplay with Hong Kong-style cinematography (complete with playable slow-mo and bullet-time). This game just rocks.

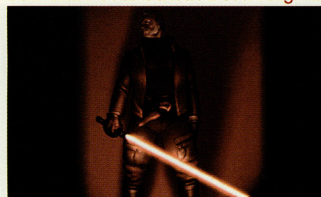
Neverwinter Nights



■ Platform: **PC**
■ Publisher: **Interplay** ■ Developer: **BioWare**

Neverwinter Nights will take RPGs to the next level, enabling players to create their own worlds and customize every facet within.

Star Wars Jedi Outcast: Jedi Knight 2



■ Platform: **PC**
■ Publisher: **LucasArts** ■ Developer: **Raven Software**

This not only looks amazing, but the lightsaber battles must be played to be believed. When more than two Jedi are fighting, the resulting melee is incredible.

Devil May Cry



■ Platform: **PLAYSTATION 2**
■ Publisher: **Capcom** ■ Developer: **Capcom**

"*Devil May Cry* was created on the concept that the program has to be absolutely cool," said creator Shinji Mikami of his action-horror title. It is. Absolutely.

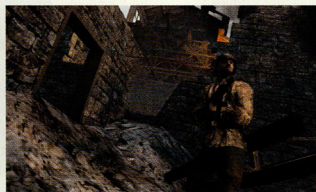
Medal of Honor Allied Assault



■ Platform: **PC**
■ Publisher: **EA** ■ Developer: **2015 Inc.**

The stunning *Quake III*-engine graphics are matched by intense gameplay. This realistic *Saving Private Ryan*-style combat sets a new high watermark.

Return to Castle Wolfenstein



■ Platform: **PC**
■ Publisher: **Activision** ■ Developer: **Grey Matter**

The granddaddy of first-person shooters is back, sporting all the latest technology and combining action, stealth, and more than a few surprises.

Star Wars: Knights of the Old Republic



■ Platform: **PC**
■ Publisher: **LucasArts** ■ Developer: **BioWare**

A 3D RPG based in the *Star Wars* universe, made by the developer of *Baldur's Gate*. Great technology and a deep storyline make this a must-have.

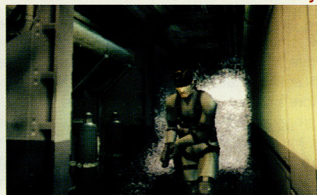
Galleon



■ Platform: **MULTI**
■ Publisher: **Interplay** ■ Dev.: **Confounding Factor**

Third-person action has been brought to the next level. Still screens can't do this game justice — you have to see it in motion to appreciate its elegant design.

Metal Gear Solid 2: Sons of Liberty



■ Platform: **PLAYSTATION 2**
■ Publisher: **Konami** ■ Developer: **Konami**

You'd think after a year of almost continual coverage we'd be jaded by now. Instead, it just keeps looking better and better. ("Look at the water!") Awesome.

Star Wars Galaxies



■ Platform: **PC**
■ Publisher: **LucasArts** ■ Developer: **Sony Online**

Come 2002, thousands of players will be able to live out a virtual existence in a living, breathing, and absolutely stunning *Star Wars* universe. Pinch us.

Star Wars Rogue Leader: Rogue Squadron II



■ Platform: **GameCube**
■ Publisher: **LucasArts** ■ Developer: **LucasArts/Factor 5**

Perfectly capturing the look and atmosphere of the *Star Wars* universe, this shooter will make you buy a GameCube if nothing else will.

Honorable Mentions

Incredible titles that nearly made the cut

Blood Wake	XBOX
Dungeon Siege	PC
Final Fantasy X	PS2
Frequency	PS2
Jet Set Radio Future	XBOX



Kameo	GAMECUBE
Maximo	PS2
Republik	PC
Silent Hill 2	PS2
Unreal Championship	XBOX
Unreal 2	PC



Best Booth of Show: LucasArts

➔ While it was more an off-the-floor meeting room than an actual booth, LucasArts still dominated with a slew of quality *Star Wars* games. In fact, astute (and even not-so-astute) readers will probably note that the publisher holds four of the top games at the show — no mean feat considering the overall exceptional quality of games at E3 this year. Still, games that didn't make the list (like *Galactic Battlegrounds*, shown above) are also looking great. This is the LucasArts we all love and remember — it looks like the days of *Jedi Power Battles* are behind us.

RUNNERS-UP:

INTERPLAY: With *Galleon*, *Run Like Hell*, *Star Trek: Shattered Universe*, and *Neverwinter Nights* in its booth, Interplay very nearly clinched the top spot.

ELECTRONIC ARTS: This was a banner year for EA. *Medal of Honor: Allied Assault*, *C&C: Renegade*, *007: Agent Under Fire*, and a ton of great sports titles all are going to help ensure the publisher's dominance in the coming year.

ACTIVISION: *Return to Wolfenstein* and *Tony Hawk 3* would have been enough to get top booth any other year — never mind the fact that there were plenty more great games.

■ DIDN'T SEE 'EM COMING

Surprises of Show:

You can't fit a square peg into a round pigeonhole

➔ Anyone who spent even a few hours on the show floor this year came away with the indisputable impression that both console and PC developers are enjoying an incredible renaissance. From updated, enhanced variations on classic themes like *Maximo* and *Spy Hunter* to entirely new ideas like *Sigma* and *Stretch Panic*, the games of this year's E3 are guaranteed to revitalize, reinvent, and redefine our industry. But even in the face of all this innovation, a few titles came out of the blue and genuinely shocked us with their creativity and uniqueness.

Sid Meier's Sim Golf

Platform: PC
Behind closed doors, we were quietly amazed by this title, which simply defies categorization. Players construct and maintain a golf course that is patronized by sims whose personal interactions are played out over the course of their golfing. The stories change depending upon the players' moods, which are decided by their affinity for the course you've constructed. Sims from *The Sims* can be imported, and you can adjust the dialogue and attributes of each golfer, or even use your in-game avatar — the club's resident pro — to interact with them directly.



Kingdom Hearts

Platform: PlayStation 2

Those patient and devoted enough to endure the line at Square's booth received a brief glimpse of the company's intriguingly out-of-left-field collaboration with Disney. The game shares the character stylings, existential musings, and fundamental feel of the *Final Fantasy* series, then shatters the convention by adding Goofy and Donald Duck as ass-kicking party members, and by pitting the player against enemies such as Aladdin's Jafar and *The Little Mermaid*'s Ursula.



Project — Ego

(development name)

Platform: Xbox

Described as "The RPG" to *Next Generation*, this Big Blue Box-developed title (along with help from Peter Molyneux) is expected to redefine the role-playing experience by eliminating the strict scripting and linear storytelling that plagues the genre. Players take control of a young boy at age 15, whose parents have been murdered, and then control his life until he grows old and dies. Throughout the course of your life your goal is to become a great hero, but how you do so is entirely up to you. The game is incredibly early, but already shows great promise.



GameCube Watch

07/01

Nintendo brings the goods to E3 and promises more to come at Spaceworld

→ It doesn't matter how much Sony promotes its game console. Nor does it matter how many games Microsoft touts at its E3 booth. Nintendo will not try to compete. The company will, instead, do things its own way — and that's just what it did at the show with regard to its next-generation GameCube console. With only a limited selection of playable software present for the big event (except to the press behind closed doors), Nintendo's display was, regardless, hugely impressive. And there were definitely some surprises.

Phantasy Island

Probably the biggest announcement at Nintendo's booth, other than the major games finally highlighted for the first time, came not from Nintendo, but from Sega. The company pledged its full support for GameCube, promising more than 10 titles in development by such major Sega players as Yuji Naka of Sonic Team. Naka is heading up an announced GameCube version of *Phantasy Star Online* (Version 2), which



■ File this one under "games no one ever thought of before" — Sega's *Monkey Ball*

was fully playable at the event, to the pleasant surprise of attendees. The game is expected to launch this year with the ability to go online and play along with — believe it or not — Dreamcast owners.

Other GameCube titles in Sega's lineup include *Monkey Ball* and *Virtua Striker 3* (Version 2002), both from development team Amusement Vision, which worked on the *Daytona* franchise. *Monkey*

Ball is a 3D puzzler in the style of *Marble Madness*, but with a twist: Instead of controlling a marble, players manipulate a monkey enclosed in a glass ball. The idea is to speed the ball around 3D levels and pick up bananas. The playable version at E3 was simply a blast, and it had gamers lining up for a go. Meanwhile, *Virtua Striker 3*, the next installment of Sega's classic arcade series, was featured at the show

running on GameCube hardware but was not playable.

Sega will also bring its sports lineup, including *NFL2K2* and *NBA2K2* to GameCube. Perhaps most exciting of all, though, is that Sonic Team's Yuji Naka is now rumored to be in development with the next installment of *Sonic the Hedgehog*, which sources say will be released exclusively to GameCube.

A Sega spokesperson



■ Monthly GameCube Watch columnist Matt Casamassina is the funny-looking editor-in-chief of IGN GameCube.com

told us that one of its big focuses of E3 was to stress "the strong relationship between Nintendo and Sega."

Playable Madden

Publisher Electronic Arts announced shortly before E3 that it would develop an initial 10 games for GameCube, and at E3 had one major franchise running on the hardware — *Madden NFL 2002*. The game, which was still early, looked as good as competing versions on PS2 and Xbox, and close observers were even heard to say that it was the most polished of the three. EA also plans to bring versions of *FIFA Major League Soccer*, *SSX*, and *NBA Street* to Nintendo's platform.

Overall, a great show for Nintendo, and the company is promising more thrills at Spaceworld later this summer.

NextGen



■ Generally speaking, a system isn't a system until it gets a version of *Madden* made for it. Welcome GameCube to the club

07/01

The X-FILES

Xclusive and Xpensive

➔ The U.S. videogame press hasn't had a chance to watch an American company launch a system in a long time. And since this is Microsoft's first console, the company has fostered good will by remaining fairly accessible throughout Xbox's 18 months of gestation. But now that its baby is just about ready to be born, will it be a chip off the old block or a red-headed stepchild?

The Old Block

Nintendo Overlord Hideo Yamauchi recently told a reporter that consoles are becoming too much like TV: The hardware is slightly different, but the content is the same. With so many publishers hedging their bets by putting so many identical titles out for every system (we hear Ubi Soft is

going to port the next *Rayman* to Intellivision and Vectrex, just in case) first-party titles and exclusive third-party games become all the more important.

Unfortunately for Microsoft, no one is really impressed with the first-party stuff right now. Due to the nature of print, this post-E3 column was written pre-E3, but we have a good idea of what's lined up. And while *Halo* and *Munch* sit prominently in Microsoft's first-party crown, too many of the games look like a PC developer's idea of what a console game should be.

We already know about a number of third-party games like *Unreal Championship*, games that are built on franchises that have appeared across most platforms. Granted, *Unreal Championship* looks great

on Xbox, but that doesn't make for a system-selling game. Exclusive titles that have a decidedly console feel, like Stormfront's *Blood Wake*, are a step in the right direction, but the potential crown jewel of the system may be the Bruce Lee game being developed by Ronin. Such a martial arts game, if done well, is the kind that will draw the hardcore gamer.

We'll be surprised if more hardcore games aren't unveiled at E3, as the Xbox team understands all too well that early adopters are going to need to see something mind-blowing to prompt them to buy the system. "Look at PlayStation 2," says Microsoft Chief Xbox Officer Robbie Bach. "How many billiard games were available at launch? I'm not even sure we're ever going to want a billiard game, but we'll want that style of game later, in 2002.

We're not really going to have puzzle games at launch either, but puzzle games are generally something that a broader audience will want."

Bach promises that 60% of the Xbox games at E3 will be exclusive, but that ratio includes the less-than-inspiring first-party titles announced at GameStock. With Nintendo poised with *Star Wars: Rogue Squadron II* (as well as anything connected to Miyamoto) and Sony ready with *Metal Gear Solid 2*, Microsoft better bring out the big guns soon.

The Stepchild

Microsoft isn't the only extremely aggressive player. There is a whole underground of hackers out there waiting to get their hands on Xbox — and it's not to play games. One of the potential nightmares for Microsoft is that Xbox



■ Jim Preston isn't just our X-FILES columnist, he's also got a Ph.D. in philosophy

becomes the cheap PC of choice for everything except playing games.

One Japanese developer we spoke to said he was so impressed with the graphical muscle of Xbox that he was able to make a rendering engine he is going to use on movies, not videogames. Granted, he's buying a dev station and not a consumer-level Xbox, but he's spending his time making something other than games.

Already discussions are popping up on IRC and newsgroups about what can be done with Xbox besides games. The emulation scene is bristling with ideas for how to get MAME on Xbox, and one former Microsoft employee recently discussed using Xboxes in server farms. It didn't take long to squeeze Linux onto Dreamcast, and most observers feel that getting Apache on Xbox shouldn't be much of a problem either.

But it will be a problem for Microsoft. Since Xbox will be priced significantly below cost, having mom-and-pop web sites from across the country buy thousands of Xboxes, but no games, is the sort of financial headache Microsoft really doesn't want. Perhaps Xbox may be too good after all.

NextGen



■ One of the newer exclusive first-party Xbox games is *Blood Wake* from developer Stormfront Studios, which Microsoft is using to compete against the likes of GameCube's *Wave Race* and PlayStation 2's *Splashdown*

■ BOOK REVIEW

Game Design: Theory & Practice

Everything you ever wanted to know about game-making — and then some

→ Richard Rouse III's *Game Design: Theory &*

Practice functions equally well as both bible and bludgeon; after reading this 584-page monster and absorbing its wealth of information, one can use the tome as a weapon with which to righteously smite nearby enemies. Game Designer/Writer/Programmer Rouse has crafted a weighty work, one that probably should be read by anyone who seeks insight into the creation and design of videogames.

As an author, Rouse lacks that certain *je ne sais quoi*; his stolid text combined with his questionable use of the language make *Game Design* a rather tough read in spots. Rouse, unfortunately, has a tendency to trample over Mark Twain's notion that a writer should use the correct word, and not its second cousin. Though it's certainly playful and correct after a fashion to substitute "solitaire" for "solitary" as in, "Games are distinct from other solitaire experiences such as reading a book..." it's also very much the

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Learn the theory behind game design, and what a designer should strive for in order to create the best game possible.

Find out about game design from six of the computer game industry's most well-respected designers—in their own words.

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Game Design Theory & Practice

Richard Rouse III
Illustrations by Steve Ogden

■ *Game Design* covers a broad range of important game design topics, including game balancing, artificial intelligence, and playtesting

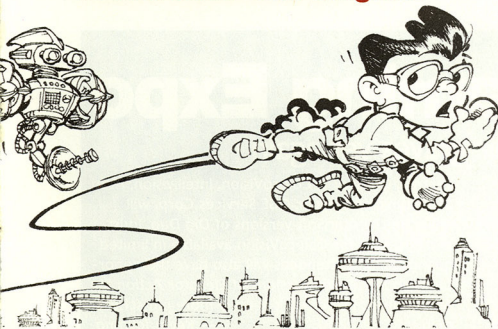
textual equivalent of a chainsaw tonsillectomy.

No matter. Rouse wins the day with his thoroughness, guiding readers through every facet of game design in 12 chapters. Text is supplemented

with incredible in-depth interviews with creators such as *The Sims'* Will Wright and Infocom legend Steve Meretzky, as it is sweetened by detailed game analyses. Rouse uses a keen eye to dissect *Tetris*, *Centipede*, and others, pointing out what they bring to the table in terms of play as well as noting their strengths and shortcomings. The book comes packaged with a Macintosh/Windows hybrid CD filled with goodies, and it includes a genuinely revelatory sample game-design document — a blueprint from which games are built — by the author and his illustrator Steve Ogden. Ultimately, in both theory and practice, Rouse's *Game Design* bible gets the job done. Let us pray.

— Greg Orlando

Text is supplemented with incredible in-depth interviews with creators such as *The Sims'* Will Wright...



■ The book is dotted with these kinds of illustrations by Steve Ogden

Game Design: Theory & Practice
By Richard Rouse III
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■ TOM RUSSO'S

In the Studio

Development news as it develops

EA'S WESTWOOD CRAVES REVENGE ON LIQUID STUDIOS

→ This one is proof that EA is occasionally too big for its own good. When EA began meeting with Crave to put together a co-publishing deal for Crave's games, several sources indicated that during the negotiations, an executive at EA-owned Westwood Studios threw a fit about the prospect of co-publishing Crave's *Battle Realms*, developed by Liquid Studios. Why the fuss? Rewind to several years ago when Liquid was first being set up by ex-Westwood employee Ed DeCastillo. As it turns out, DeCastillo recruited several other Westwood employees to form the *Battle Realms* team. While DeCastillo refused to comment on the situation, several sources have confirmed *Battle Realms* is not part of the EA deal. "Originally," said one source, "*Battle Realms* was a very valued component of that deal, as seen on both sides." As of press time, sources had indicated that another publisher had already agreed to pick up *Battle Realms*, while the deal between EA and Crave had not yet been announced. Subsequently, there is still a chance that the EA/Crave partnership may never come to pass. But the fact remains that, as another anonymous industry insider said, "[EA] certainly walked away from a substantial seller." Is it fair for EA executives to exercise personal grudges by refusing to partake in a revenue stream? We don't think EA stockholders would approve.



SIERRA REVIVES GLADIATOR

→ Russell Crowe's Maximus never said, "What we do in film echoes in videogames" — but he should have. Word from the inside has it that Sierra has picked up the rights to a game based on Ridley Scott's Oscar-winning picture. While we look forward to a game where the hero actually dies at the end, it will be some time before this one's ready. And as we've already stated, Maximus dies, so there'll be no timing this game with a movie sequel.



TERMINAL REALITY: OUT FOR BLOOD

→ We recently stole a quick glimpse of Texas-based Terminal Reality's top-secret action-adventure project called *Bloodlust*. Set in WWII Europe, the game stars Svetlana Lupescu, a half-vampire assassin bent on taking out the Nazis. Armed with twin blades and boasting the agile moves of an anime hero, Svetlana looks like a cross between Blade and Spider-Man. The early Xbox-only tech demo we saw (pictured below) already featured fantastic lighting and a few cool gameplay hooks — notably, the ability to run up walls like Jackie Chan or the stars of *The Matrix*.



CHECK SIX DEVELOPS SPYRO FOR PS2

→ It's well known that Insomniac Games, creator of the *Spyro* series, has moved on to a new, original property for PS2. But what isn't known is that the new *Spyro* game for PS2 will be developed by L.A.-based Check Six games. Check Six was founded in March of '98 by Brent Oster, and the company began developing the *Maya* real-time SDK for Alias Wavefront. The team now intends to use the SDK to create the game. Several Check Six members gained their experience at Sega, Retro Studios, and Hudson Soft, but most of them (including Oster) worked on Activision projects including *Heavy Gear 2*, *BattleZone 2*, and *MechWarrior 2*.



R.I.P. XFL — THQ M.I.A.

→ Now that the XFL is officially a one-season wonder, we have to speculate on the fate of the PS2 title based on Vince McMahon's failed gridiron experiment. THQ, the publisher in charge of the as-yet-unannounced project, was already very wary of the XFL's dismal first season, and it was looking more and more likely the game would ship as some kind of arcade-style football game without the XFL license. Now we can pretty much guarantee it.



■ RETRO GAMERS UNITE

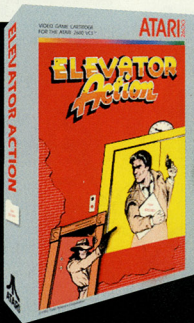
Classic Gaming Expo

The classics rise from their graves yet again

→ Mark your calendars: The fourth annual Classic Gaming Expo is quickly approaching on Aug. 11-12 at the Jackie Gaughan's Plaza Hotel in Las Vegas, NV. This year's show will feature updates and re-releases from publishers such as Midway, Namco, and Activision. If you're a classic game connoisseur or collector, you shouldn't miss the opportunity to see, play, buy, and trade games on

Vectrex, Odyssey 2, ColecoVision, Intellivision, Atari 2600, Lynx, and Jaguar. CGE Services Corp. will make official AtariSoft versions of *Dig Dug*, *Joust*, and *Pac-Man* for ColecoVision available in limited quantities, and attendees will also have the opportunity to buy boxed versions of *Elevator Action* for Atari 2600. It just doesn't get any more old-school than this.

— Kevin Toyama



→ Alphas

Next Generation brings you an unreal number of exclusive previews every month

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A screenshot from the game Unreal Championship showing a dark, industrial environment with a large, metallic structure in the foreground and a bright light source in the background. The scene is dimly lit, with the light source creating a strong glow and casting long shadows.

■ XBOX

UNREAL CHAMPIONSHIP

■ Publisher: Infogrames ■ Developer: Digital Extremes ■ Release Date: Q1 2002 ■ Origin: Canada

Can Digital Extremes redefine the FPS experience for the console world?

➔ *Quake III Revolution*, *Unreal Tournament*, and *TimeSplitters* help illustrate this point: The rash of PS2 multiplayer-only first-person shooters have been well-done games, but this genre-born-of-the-PC will only attract a smaller hardcore niche until someone can find a way to make the games appealing to the bulk of console players.

It's quite unexpected, then, that the first developer attempting to bridge this gap comes from a long line of popular PC first-person shooters and has no console

background whatsoever. But developer Digital Extremes, which co-developed both *Unreal* and *Unreal Tournament* with Epic, has started this project from scratch, with as few preconceptions as possible. Their goal? To bring the frenetic, multiplayer FPS action that PC users have enjoyed to consoles, in a format that finally fits the medium — instead of just being shoehorned into it. "We all know that there is a significant difference between what people expect from a PC game and what they expect from

a console game," admits Digital Extremes Lead Designer James Schmalz. "Building the game from the ground up for the console allows us to address all of the issues that we couldn't with a port."

Unreal Championship's emphasis, like previous multiplayer-only shooters, is purely on fast action with several different multiplayer modes that emphasize both individual achievement (Deathmatch) and team-based play (Capture the Flag, Team

→ Alphas

■ It's expected that, because of the high speeds of a broadband connection, 16 players will be able to play together online



Deathmatch). Along with the old standbys, *UC* will also include three never-before-seen multiplayer modes, but as these new modes are not finalized, the team was reluctant to discuss them. We do know that the game will include a mode called Domination 2.0, which is an improved version of the popular *Unreal Tournament* mode where teams

must capture and hold several areas on a map to gain points.

As in *UT*, the single-player mode has been de-emphasized and consists of a tournament ladder in which you play through each of the modes against AI bots instead of actual people. This time, however, the story has been fleshed out, and each of the 24 characters — more will be

“Volumetrically lit, wind-affected smoke is not something you see every day and is very cool”

— James Schmalz, lead designer, Digital Extremes

unlockable — is thematically linked to the levels in the game. The Male and Female Space Marines, for example, are based on the Space Station. Schmalz says that he hopes to make the single-player game a much more cohesive experience than it has been in the past, even though it's still not really the primary mode of play.

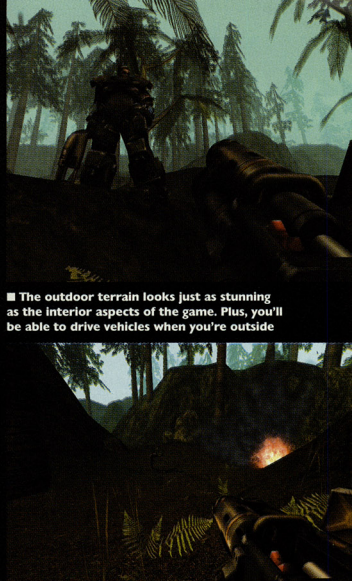
As the focus here is multiplayer battles, the game couldn't be designed without online play. This made Xbox, with its built-in Ethernet port and hard drive (not to mention its *Unreal*-technology-friendly hardware), the ideal solution. Unfortunately, while an online multiplayer option will definitely be included, Microsoft's vague broadband strategy has kept many development decisions in limbo. Presumably, the

■ The player models are both highly detailed and self-shadowing





■ UC will feature three brand-new multiplayer modes plus several old favorites



■ The outdoor terrain looks just as stunning as the interior aspects of the game. Plus, you'll be able to drive vehicles when you're outside

low ping times afforded by broadband will iron out many of the problems that have plagued modem-based play, and the team says that it should be able to get 16 players in each match. In an ideal situation, players could use both company-run servers as well as set up their own. Owing to the nature of the hard drive, even downloadable content — new levels, new player models, etc. — is a very real possibility. Schmalz insists that he and the team are exploring every possible avenue. "We have lots of great ideas we're preparing," he says. "Those things would be fantastic to have in the game, and naturally we've been thinking along those lines, but we will have to wait and see."

Aside from the connectivity concerns, the other major hurdle the team faces is how to design a comfortable and accurate control scheme for a gamepad instead of a mouse and keyboard. Schmalz contends that the problem isn't the gamepad interface itself; it's the currently prescribed PC-centric theories of FPS level design. "[UC] is being developed from the ground up using the gamepad as the default interface," he says. "The level designers are using it too as they build and test the levels, thus the resultant gameplay is totally geared towards the controller." The current controller setup is very familiar. Both analog sticks are used for moving and looking around, while the shoulder button fires your primary weapon — but Schmalz says that nothing is final until the game ships. "We are trying out a lot of controller configurations

and different controller options with the hope of achieving the perfect balance," he says.

Some new control ideas have already made their way into the game. The first is the 90-degree turn buttons (both left and right), which enable the character to pivot quickly — we used these buttons a lot when we played the game, and it really helped. Another notable addition is the double jump, which enables players not only to reach higher areas, but also to have a bit more hope of escaping the impending doom of a well-aimed rocket. Finally, the team realizes that players are going to need to communicate among themselves — for team-based play or just pure taunting purposes — despite the lack of a keyboard. To this end, the team is

hoping to create a highly customizable system where players can map whatever commands taunts they want to different buttons in the game.

The biggest changes from the Unreal formula are the addition of wide-open outdoor areas and the ability to drive and ride in vehicles Tribes-style. Still, there are going to be some twists. Schmalz excitedly explains how this significantly alters the gameplay environment: "Just imagine ripping across the terrain — you in the gunner seat, your buddy is driving. Your enemy is beside you in another vehicle, and you blast the gunner out of the front seat then leap over as the vehicle is still moving into his seat and continue on. Now you take that vehicle and drive it as fast as you can



■ This Egyptian-themed level puts the ones in *Unreal Tournament* to shame. It's so detailed you can actually see sand sifting through the ceiling

GO BERSERK

Instead of making the damage amplifier an item you find and pick up, Digital Extremes has implemented the "berserk meter" to achieve the same effect in a more console-friendly fashion. "What we're going to do is put in a Capcom-style meter where the more you're running around killing people in a fast time frame without dying, the more your meter's going to fill up," explains Infogrames Associate Producer James Hess. "Once you hit your max, you're basically damage-amplified and running around doing much more damage to everyone."

→ Alphas

into the enemy base, leaping out to safety just before it enters the front blast doors. The resultant explosion of the impacting and exploding vehicle wipes out anyone in the base, leaving it relatively safe for you to enter. These are the kinds of additions to the gameplay we are getting with vehicles."

From a gameplay standpoint, the vehicle will also offer the player some extra firepower as well as some protection against enemy fire. Still, you can't get cocky — a well-aimed head shot is still just as likely to take you out.

Using the current version of the Unreal engine as a foundation gives the team some real advantages. Aside from the huge outdoor environments, another immediately noticeable benefit is in the player models, which now consist of 2,500 to 3,000 polygons each. This high level of detail isn't necessarily something you're conscious of while in the midst of a dramatic firefight,

■ There are currently six different character themes in the game, ranging from space marines to hellish demons



but it enhances the overall feeling of realism and intensity. Player faces, for example, are clearly defined and — time willing — may even be animated for speech or emotional responses. (How cool would it be to see an opponent get angry when you narrowly miss him with a rocket?)

"We get Epic's fantastic technology as a starting platform, and then we have some incredible

programmers who add specific technologies on top of that," explains Schmalz. "The list of technologies we are planning on adding is huge." So far, the most impressive Digital Extremes addition is the use of volumetrically lit smoke and fog, which not only look fantastic — lights refract and reflect appropriately — but actually react to the game around them. If you shoot a rocket

"UC is being developed from the ground up using the gamepad as the default interface."

— James Schmalz



■ Many of the weapons in UC are similar to those in UT, but they have all been further tweaked to fit the new game

THE BIG GUNS!

Most of the guns in *Unreal Championship* are refined versions of UT weapons. For example, the rocket launcher now only has three barrels, but it's possible, if you have the skill, to lock a second heat-seeking rocket onto the first for a combo hit. There are, however, some totally new twists. The Link is a weapon that actually requires three people to pull off one super-sized shot. Basically, two people together shoot at a third, who has the Link, and the third then gets to aim and fire the supershot. The orbiting ion cannon is the other big new weapon. Basically, if this satellite has line of sight — via a window or outdoor area — a player can use a special targeting rifle to call down death from above.

■ One idea under consideration is to use the hard drive to create a sense of permanent damage in the single-player game levels

through the smoke, for example, the rocket will blow a hole in the smoke and create a trail where the smoke clings to it. Fog also clings to players believably as they run through it — for an incredibly dramatic effect. "Pixel shaders are very cool and all, but when everyone is using them, they become less interesting," emphasizes Schmalz. "Volumetrically lit, wind-affected smoke is not something you see every day and is very cool. These kinds of technologies are what will help make UC

stand out and are what we are spending a significant amount of time focusing on."

It will be quite a while before we're all playing *Unreal Championship*. Infogrames insists the game will not ship until Xbox has online play up and running. Still, several levels are already playable, and while they're obviously not fine-tuned, each showcases the team's refusal to create another PC shooter wedged onto a console. That alone makes it worth keeping an eye on.

— Blake Fischer



■ The volumetrically lit smoke is one of the most impressive new special effects in the game. Not only is the smoke accurately lit by the environment, it also swirls believably and clings to bullets and people going through it



■ In some missions, you'll have to chase down a chopper carrying the loot. Unfortunately, it risks being shelled, so it won't stay put for very long

■ **PLAYSTATION 2**

SMUGGLER'S RUN 2: HOSTILE TERRITORY

■ Publisher: **Rockstar** ■ Developer: **Angel Studios** ■ Release Date: **October** ■ Origin: **US**

Strap a nuke on your buggy and make for the border

➔ The first *Smuggler's Run* was notable for being one of the only games at the PS2 launch that showed both technology and design ambition. The idea that you could race cars around huge five-square-mile environments was something that other developers — facing the daunting new hardware's tight development calendar — didn't even want to think about. Still, despite its impressive car physics and rendering technology, the game occasionally stalled when it came to gameplay variety and plot. With *Smuggler's Run 2*, the team at Angel Studios is taking steps to involve the player in the action like never before, while at the same time upping the ante in the realm of PlayStation 2 technology.

The first step was to make the locations in the sequel edgier and a bit more exciting. Angel's choice? The deserts of

Afghanistan and the jungles of Vietnam.

"We're trying to create the sense of being in the warzone," says Angel Game Designer Wing Cho. "Things are happening all around and you're just trying to profit from them." In fact, the game world was entirely created from research and photography, as the real-world areas themselves are too dangerous for the team to document firsthand. "We looked into it and we found out that there are only about five people allowed to go to Afghanistan — and they're all top CIA operatives," explains Angel Producer Glen Hernandez. "The percentage of tourists who get robbed is 100%, so it's pretty much a deadly place to go."

Given the locales, you can bet your new cargo is a little riskier as well. "You're smuggling in very small, high-per-

formance off-road vehicles," says Rockstar Executive Producer Dan Houser, "so we wanted to find something that you can smuggle in small



■ The vehicles are similar to those in the first game, but the detail has been enhanced and they are more military in style

→ Alphas



■ After you complete your primary mission, some levels won't end until you destroy — or ditch — all of the opposition's vehicles

vehicles — drugs you smuggle in an oil tanker. We thought that nuclear secrets would be the most fun." In later levels, you'll take off across the desert or jungle making low-grade weapons runs. Given the fragile, explosive nature of the cargo, a few bad bumps and you're done for. It really becomes a problem with enemy tanks and howitzers firing at you — not to mention the minefields that lie between you and your destination or the

horde of enemy vehicles determined to stop you at all costs.

The game will be held together by a much stronger narrative this time around. You start off as a small-time smuggler in Afghanistan, making some easy money smuggling nuclear secrets for a corrupt Russian military organization. A couple of missions into the game, however, your routine starts to fall apart as you realize that things aren't what

they seem, and you're actually being watched by the CIA and other intelligence agencies. The story will progress through 30 missions total — 10 each in Afghanistan, Vietnam, and then Afghanistan again, but in the snow this time — and we're told to expect some great drama, as well as a few plot twists.

After setting up the premise and story, the team got down to designing



■ Not only will you have to deal with rain and snow, but some missions will be at night and visible only through "green-screen" night vision





■ Thanks to the advanced physics system, each vehicle will have its own weight and suspension parameters that will affect the way it plays

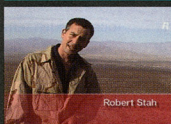
the real meat of the actual missions. While the basic formula has stayed the same as in the last game — you pick up items and then run them to other locations — the designers have done a good job of mixing things up. Some missions may have you chasing after a helicopter that can only land for a limited time for pickups, while others may have you watching the skies waiting for an air drop. Other missions may have you running down a rival's vehicle and following other cars through dangerous areas. "I think we've gained a lot from our past experience," says Hernandez about the work the team did on the first game. "We really spent a lot of time designing each level before we started building anything to make sure that every

part of it had special elements for gameplay purposes."

The enemies aren't going to be pushovers this time around either, because the AI has been completely overhauled. "There are now different rules for different AI characters, and it completely opens up the game and gives you a whole lot more strategy in what you have to watch for," claims Hernandez. "Now you can see that there are certain players that are trying to quickly pick up the lot and drop it off in the correct spot. Others are going to attack opponents; others are going to block the guy who's trying to score; and some will actually just sit there by the pickup spot waiting for someone to come so they can steal the cargo away."

Some missions provide you with AI partners in crime, and you must choose their vehicles, which will also play a strategic part in completing the level. For example, in one mission you might pick the small and fast buggy for yourself and

BAD BOYS, WHAT'CHA GONNA DO?



Robert Stah



(Voice Disguised)

At the very beginning of SR2's development cycle, the team created an internal video that would not only serve to pump the team up, but also help to gel the theme for the new game. This video was never really meant to be shown to outsiders, but Next Generation managed to grab a few stills. Since the movie stars Angel personnel, the faces in these pictures are actually members of the *Smuggler's Run 2* team. The blacked-out criminal overlord in the picture is in fact the company's Chief Creative Officer Michael Limber, and news anchor Robert Stah is actually Art Director Dave McGrath.



■ Vietnam's terrain varies wildly from bamboo forests to tiered rice fields



■ The dense ground cover in Vietnam is among the most realistic we've ever seen

massive trucks or SUVs for your CPU escorts so they'll act as blockers. These kinds of tactics should prove crucial in some cases, as certain missions won't end until you've lost or destroyed all of your pursuers.

A new, highly optimized rendering engine has made the sequel look spectacular. While the eight vehicles in the game, ranging from small buggies to massive trucks, are bristling with detail, it's once again the terrain engine that steals the show. Vietnam, in particular,

defies current console conventions with its lush vegetation and sheer variety of locales. Driving around the level we found hidden temple ruins on a small island, a Vietnamese village, a pontoon bridge, a solid bridge (which exploded as we raced across), rice fields (which will eventually be populated with workers), and hilltops that offered spectacular views of the whole playable area.

When placed side-by-side, the difference between this sequel and the original is night and day. "We didn't even realize how different it was," says an astounded

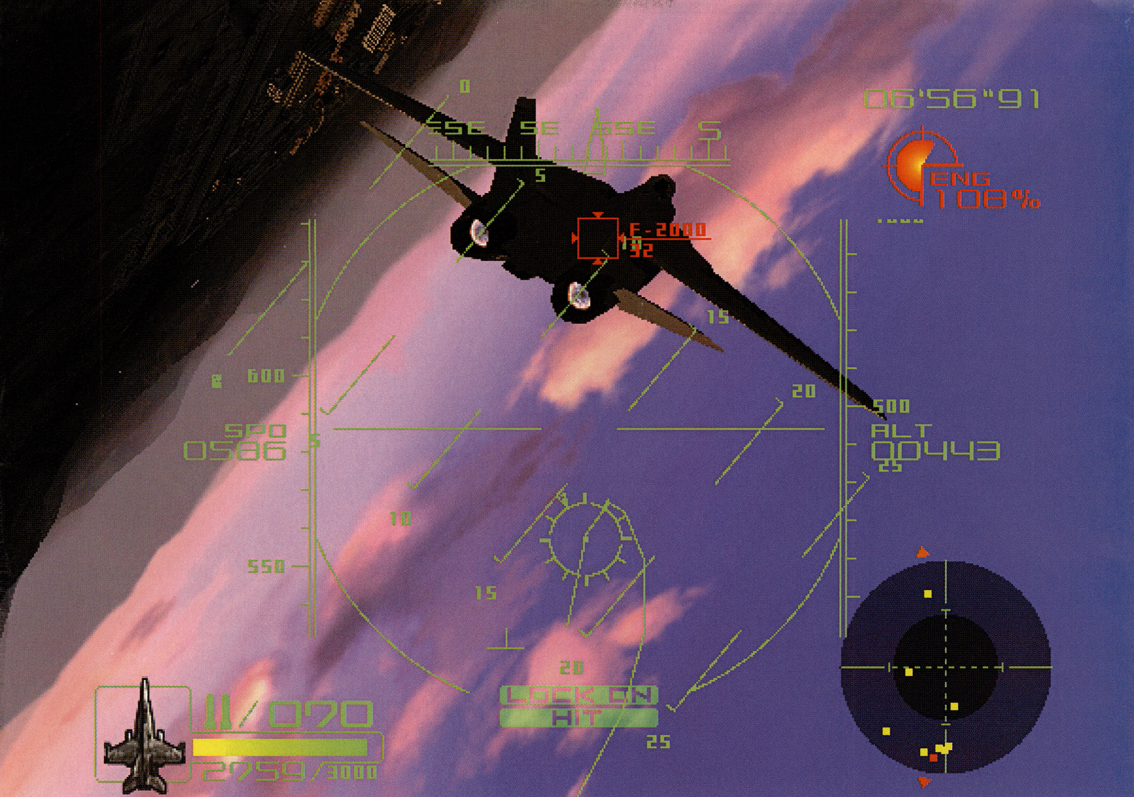
Hernandez, "until we pulled out the old game and saw that it was nothing but sand." The team has enhanced the detail significantly and upgraded almost every aspect of the game engine, so it comes as a bit of a surprise that it intends to double the framerate of the original, locking SR2 down at 60fps.

Angel seems on track once again to raise people's expectations of PS2 games. Lesser teams have buckled under the weight of such ambitions, but SR2 is well on its way to proving Angel has the skills to pull it off. — Blake Fischer



■ In Afghanistan, a war wages around you — complete with explosions, minefields, and the occasional tank firing at you





■ While true flight combat sims have never really taken off on consoles, arcade-style titles like *Airforce Delta 2* do offer a quick, easy-to-jump-into alternative

■ **XBOX**

AIRFORCE DELTA 2

■ Publisher: **Konami** ■ Developer: **Konami** ■ Release Date: **October** ■ Origin: **Japan**

Aim higher: At least they're trying in this sequel

➔ Although not many Japanese companies have taken the Xbox bait, Konami has thrown in with at least a few titles, including this one. While the original *Airforce Delta* for Dreamcast was, at best, a glaringly mediocre flight combat game, this is a sequel in name

only. The entire game has been completely revamped from the engine up. Digging down at least a little into Xbox's programmable Nvidia GPU, the team at Konami has put together some very nice landscapes, with notably looming buildings and architecture — some of which, as the screenshots show, can apparently be flown through.

At press time there was little information about specific missions or the overall structure of the game, but you can probably expect the usual mix of air-to-air dogfights and ground attack sorties. The original Dreamcast game offered more than 30 different types of aircraft, but when a playable version of AD2 was shown at Tokyo Game Show, only five craft were on display: the F-14, A-10, S-37, F-18, and IDF. And, underneath the grumbling of the Japanese press about the Xbox controller being "too big," most who tried the game agreed the control

and maneuverability were well implemented, with a suitably arcade-like feel.

Airforce Delta 2's predicted October launch places it well within the launch window of Xbox itself, so you can expect the game to hit either as a launch title, or a barely post-launch title for the system. The game will have some competition (see sidebar), but already it's clear AD2 will climb above the lackluster cloud bank that its predecessor never managed to break free of. — Jeff Lundrigan

KONAMI VS. NAMCO

Airforce Delta 2 for Xbox will face another airborne title this fall, Namco's *Ace Combat 4* on PlayStation 2. Although both games are still in the early stages, at least a few visual differences are readily apparent. AD2's landscapes are generally more detailed than AC4's, but exactly the opposite can be said of the featured aircraft. The Namco team has added dirt and dents to its planes' textures, where Konami's look a lot like Tyco models right out of the box.



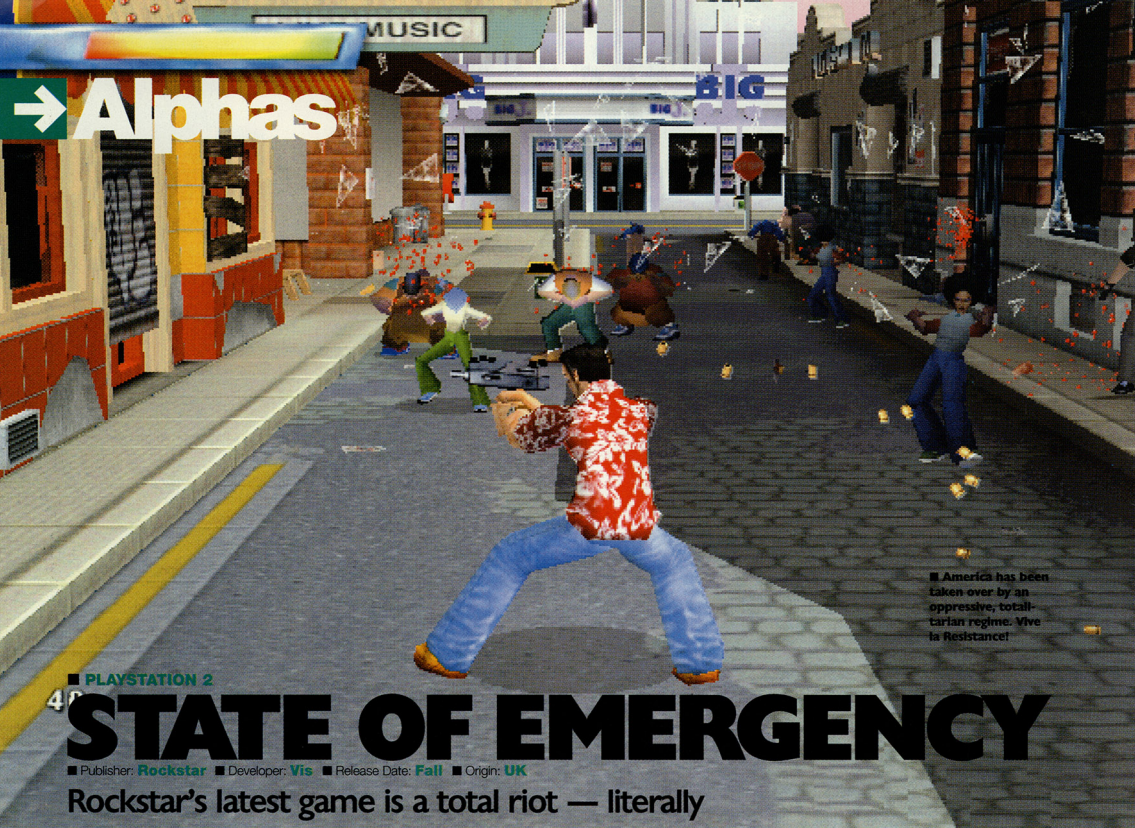
■ We're not entirely sure why a supersonic fighter jet would fly inside a building, but it would seem that in this game, you can



■ Not every mission is a dogfight — occasionally you get to bomb things as well



→ **Alphas**



■ America has been taken over by an oppressive, totalitarian regime. **Vive la Resistance!**

PLAYSTATION 2

STATE OF EMERGENCY

Publisher: **Rockstar** ■ Developer: **Vis** ■ Release Date: **Fall** ■ Origin: **UK**

Rockstar's latest game is a total riot — literally

➔ Sometime in the near future, things have gone terribly wrong. America, once a proud and lawful nation, has fallen into anarchy, ruled by merciless street gangs and the ATO, an oppressive government regime that rules with an iron fist. In their quest to destabilize the ATO, organized rebels have instigated a full-scale riot. And as a member of the resistance, not only are you stuck in the middle of this storm of violence and destruction — it's your job to keep it going.

As it turns out, the easiest way to perpetuate a riot is with gunfire, looting, and lots and lots of explosions. In fact,

Vis Producer Craig Hunter is understandably proud of the gradual, nearly organic transformation that takes place as the game is played. "The moment you start the game, you see up to 200 characters running, cowering, fighting, and looting," he says. "By the time you're finished, buildings and vehicles will lie burnt and shattered; bodies will litter the streets and pavements; fires will

burn out of control; and tear gas will drift across your view." Odd though it may sound, we can't wait to see that.

What separates SOE from the crowd is the amount of sheer insanity being reproduced onscreen, thanks to PS2's swift processor and beefy polygon budget. Each vast, highly destructible cityscape throbs with the sights and



■ Your weaponry will range from serious artillery to bricks and park benches





■ There are four cities with at least 20 missions each, including this trip to the ATO bank to make a rather large withdrawal

sounds of chaos, thanks to countless rioters, gang bangers, civilians, and peacekeepers — each with unique, sophisticated pathfinding and reactionary AI.

"How people react to the player depends on circumstances," explains Hunter. "Gangs take somebody walking past them wielding an Uzi with a pinch of salt — until you shoot one of their members. Peacekeepers, however, will not tolerate your walking around with a firearm — let alone a flame-thrower." Luckily, you know your way around a knuckle sandwich and can defend yourself. Your battle against the forces of order, as well as everyone else, is also made easier by a plethora of weapons, ranging from the aforementioned Uzi

and a bazooka to environmental elements such as park benches, trash cans, and videogaming's current bullet-point-worthy weapon of choice, severed body parts.

There are five selectable freedom fighters in SOE, each with an over-the-top look and a unique set of abilities (speed, strength, resilience, etc.). Missions begin with simple acts like bombing a building into rubble or beating gangbangers into a stupor, and culminate in more complex assignments such as assassinating a heavily guarded ATO official. According to Hunter, designing the gameplay wasn't easy. "The most difficult thing was trying to work out how to apply structure to something which, by its very nature, is anarchic, random, and uncontrollable," he says. As a tradeoff, while there are definite tasks to accomplish, the order of their completion (and subsequent plot development) is decidedly non-linear.

Meshing the cartoonish, tongue-in-cheek arcade atmosphere of *Crazy Taxi* with the man-against-the-mob warfare of *Dynasty Warriors 2*, we're thinking Rockstar's *State of Emergency* may take the classic old-school arcade brawler to the next level of intensity. — Eric Bratcher

THE NOT EVEN REMOTELY USUAL SUSPECTS

Not only does each of the five playable characters in *State of Emergency* have a unique look, backstory, and reason for joining the resistance, but each has a different set of strengths and weaknesses. This shouldn't limit gameplay, however; the player will be able to switch from one character to another almost at will — much like in Square's *The Bouncer* — so you're always able to command the best operative for the situation.



■ There are interior areas as well. Gangbangers are an unpredictable but aggressive bunch and can often be goaded into fighting peacekeepers — or one another



■ There will be up to 200 characters in a given riot, which will be helpful when you need to evade pursuing gang members or ATO peacekeepers



■ Explosions during the game look to be both frequent and quite well crafted

→ Alphas

■ The team has foregone the pre-rendered environments of the first game for a lush, fully 3D world



■ PLAYSTATION 2

TAMAMAYU MONOGATARI 2

■ Publisher: Genki (Japan) ■ Developer: Genki ■ Release Date: Summer (Japan) ■ Origin: Japan

Get by with a little help from your monster friends

→ While the original PSX *Tamamayu Monogatari* — known as *Jade Cocoon* in the U.S. — didn't exactly set the world afire with its RPG/monster-breeding gameplay, developer Genki is determined to make another go of the idea on PS2. This time, the team has taken the critical responses to the first game — namely short play time, repetitive gameplay, and inconsistent storytelling — to heart and has created a fresh new experience in the same vein.

Besides the obvious graphical facelift afforded by the new hardware, the team

at Genki is striving to include two to three times more content for players in this sequel. The core gameplay is still a familiar combination of RPG-like exploration, capturing monsters, and using them to fight (similar to *Pokémon*). But now there are more (over 100) monsters to gather and much more to see and do. For instance, to beat the game, players will have to explore four 20-level dungeons and defeat all the monsters within, using both their own arsenals and those of the monsters they've trained.

The production quality seems to be as high as, or higher than, in the first game, with character designs again done by Kondo Katsuya from Hayao Miyazaki's (see sidebar) famed Studio Ghibli in Japan. This time, though, on the storytelling front, Genki is including full voiceover for the more than 1,000 scenes that help to illustrate the story.

The pieces are once again in place for what could be a fun and unique roleplaying experience. The first game may have lacked the follow-through that would have made it a smash, but this

one's tweaked gameplay and enhanced graphics may be just what the series needs to take it that extra step. As of press time, there had been no announcements by Crave about taking this one stateside, but we expect it will show up at some point from one publisher or another.

— Blake Fischer/Christophe Kagotani



Hayao Miyazaki — the founder of the studio that did the character designs for both *Tamamayu Monogatari 2* and its prequel — isn't exactly a household name in the United States, but his distinctive anime work has made him a legend in Japan. In the last few years, a couple of his movies, namely *Kiki's Delivery Service* and *Princess Mononoke*, have been released in U.S. theatres and on video — and they're definitely worth checking out.



■ The battle system is original and fairly intuitive. The marks in the circle surrounding your character represent different elemental attacks, which must be selected for every round of combat

■ The four dungeons in the game represent each of the four elements — wind, water, earth, and fire





Will Rainbow Studios' next racing opus put Nintendo in hot water?



→ Few games have stood the test of time better than Nintendo's *Wave Race 64*. Since its 1996 release, there have been several Jet Ski games released by competitors for other platforms, but none has even come close to the graphical beauty and sheer playability of the original. So imagine our surprise when Infogrames sat us down with a playable version of its secret new wet bike racer, *Splashdown*. Within minutes of our demo, it became apparent that this might finally be the game that beat Nintendo at its own (albeit old) game.

At this point, it's not necessarily the look of *Splashdown* that's so impressive, but the sheer feel of the gameplay. With stunning wave propagation physics, Rainbow Studios has done an amazing job of re-creating the way your watercraft

interacts with the water. Even at this early stage, the control feels very natural. You race around using the analog stick to steer, and have to time your jumps correctly off the waves to maintain speed. You can also shift your weight forward to take a slight dive underwater, followed by a buoyant pop back out.

Subsequently, like *Wave Race*, the impetus is on working in harmony with the forces of water, and pulling off tricks is a secondary part of the game design. Tricks weren't working properly in the version we played, but they were described as very similar to those in Rainbow's last game, *ATV Offroad Fury*. All you have to do to pull one off is hit a button and direction on the controller to



■ Many areas off the beaten track are accessible with a well-timed jump



■ The water both looks real and acts believably as well



execute one of three dozen scripted maneuvers. Not *Tony Hawk's Pro Skater* by any stretch, but there are additional flips (which were simply not possible on an ATV) that should mix things up a bit when combined with the scripted stunts.

The game structure itself is typical of any racer. Players can choose from four riders initially — at least five more can be unlocked — and race through 18 international tracks, ranging from the Amazon to Loch Ness. Of course, the tracks all come complete with shortcuts galore and plenty of eye candy to keep you coming back. While the AI riders weren't yet in the version we played, the team can already put four of them on the track alongside the player with no slowdown problems, and they hope to include up to seven after code optimization. As a result of the game's physics-based nature, the wake created by each rider will affect all of the others, and a two-player splitscreen mode should stir things up further.

Yet Rainbow Studios' biggest challenge may be something beyond its control. Nintendo is hard at work on a GameCube



update for *Wave Race*, and insiders who have seen the project have been blown away by its progress. The competition will be fierce this holiday season — and if

recent *Rainbow* projects (*ATV Offroad Fury*, *Motocross Madness 2*) are any indication, the developer will still be a hard act to follow, much less beat. — Blake Fischer

NO BORDERS

One of the more intriguing things about the version of *Splashdown* we played was how much space there was off the track. On a whim, we took a hard right at one point and veered off into unknown waters. Instead of hitting a world boundary, we just keep going and going, passing small islands as we went. Eventually we hit the edge of the world, but that was after a good five minutes of driving away from the track. Even the game's producer wasn't sure what the team had planned for all of this extra space (our guess: some sort of free-ride stunt mode), so it still remains a mystery.



■ The tricks are based on a ladder-like system. If you complete an easy move you then get charged up a little and can attempt harder ones



■ As the mosquito, your job is to fly to your sleeping victim, land, and start sucking blood — but remember that precision and care are important

■ PLAYSTATION 2

KA

■ Publisher: **Sony** ■ Developer: **Zoom** ■ Release Date: **July (Japan)** ■ Origin: **Japan**

Move over Kain — here comes a real-world bloodsucker

➔ Originality has proven to be Sony's biggest problem since the release of PS2 nearly 16 months ago. Although we've seen some quality titles, *Ka* (which, translated from Japanese, means "mosquito") is really the first to offer an unprecedented gameplay experience. It is

a mosquito simulator.

As a mosquito, your main objective is to suck blood from your prey — in this case, the Yamada family. Operating under typical console flight controls, you must pilot the mosquito to a possible bite zone, which is indicated by red circles on the target victim. Once you've successfully landed, you must make circular movements with the right analog stick to begin feeding — the speed of which controls how fast you draw in blood. If you fly too fast and collide with a victim, or bite too viciously, you'll alert them. If this occurs, human logic would dictate that you should escape, but instead, you're faced with mosquito logic: You must harass them further. The game requires that you continue to poke various targets on the prey's body, while your victim tries to crush, swat, burn, or poison you.

Initially, we thought *Ka* might become repetitive in its simplicity — suck blood

and fly around. But Sony seems to have enhanced the game with some strategy elements. In one example, a light switch appears on the screen as a target. This suggests that players must turn the lights off, thereby hindering your prey's vision and making it easier to stage an attack.

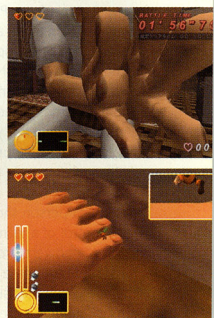
With an amazing sense of scale, numerous areas of the house to explore, and uncommon gameplay, *Ka* has the potential to be Sony's most innovative titles in quite a while. — Chet Barber

AVOIDING DEATH

Aside from escaping death at the hands of your prey, you'll have to avoid traps and hazards spread throughout the various rooms. (One in particular appears to be a stovetop burner.) We expect other traps to include lights, bug zappers, poisons, and the jaws of animals.



■ Annoy the family and they'll come after you. Instead of running, you'll need an even stronger offensive attack to win



A MATTER OF INTELLIGENCE

Animation will be used to vary NPC responses, hiking up the impression of good AI. "Characters in these types of games don't usually react properly, and it's not just bad AI. The AI is often all right in terms of making decisions," says Director Glyn Williams. "But they won't do anything to let you know that they're responding to you. A good example is encountering an enemy and them immediately engaging you, rather than them going about their business, looking at you, and then reacting." Williams is confident that this can be done with effective scripting. "One script will be in control of walking up and down a street, and another can look for enemies, which should allow less modality in behavior."

■ Innovative uses of space, sophisticated lighting effects, and lots of detail look set to create an incredible sense of immersion

■ PLAYSTATION 2

EXO

■ Publisher: **Infogrames** ■ Developer: **Particle Systems**
■ Release Date: **Spring 2002** ■ Origin: **UK**

Armored combat never looked this good

→ As a platform, PlayStation 2 continues to mature, and more developers are coming to grips with what the system can truly do. No surer sign of this exists than the growing number of deep, complex games in the works for PS2, and to their number you can add *EXO*, one of the more impressive-looking titles we've seen.

Nominally, *EXO* is a futuristic, squad-based first-person shooter in which you take control of a team of security agents garbed in powered robotic exoskeletons. There are three types of exoskeleton: the two-meter suit (or powered armor); the three-meter suit, which

blends maneuverability with firepower; and the lumbering five-meter suit (or walking tank). Switching between characters on your team is as easy as clicking a context-sensitive button when you make eye contact with the teammate you want, or choosing them from a separate tactical menu.

At various times, different numbers and types of squad members will be available. "We're thinking of interesting puzzles where you have to use characters in combination," says Glyn Williams, director and project lead. "We have buildings that only offer access to smaller suits, and we can vary things by forcing a

smaller character to do something; you won't be able just to wade in with the biggest character."

As you can see by the screenshots, it's the technology that really makes *EXO* stand out at this early stage. The team has consciously tried to play up PlayStation 2's core strengths and has created a world that is very high-poly, but low in overall textures, opting to use effects like lighting and animation to compensate. It already looks striking and makes us eager to see more.

— Jeff Lundrigan/Nigel Edge



■ There are eight different dinosaurs in the game including such favorites as the T-Rex and Compsys. The biggest new addition is the Spinosaurus, which is even bigger than the T-Rex

PLAYSTATION 2

JURASSIC PARK: SURVIVAL

■ Publisher: **Universal Interactive** ■ Developer: **Savage Entertainment** ■ Release Date: **Q4** ■ Origin: **US**

Just blow up the island already!

➔ Let's face it: It's far easier to make fun of the last *Jurassic Park* games than to commend them. Still, with a fresh perspective and the horsepower of modern technology, Marina Del Rey-based Savage Entertainment is hoping not only to exorcise the specters of the past, but to finally bring the thrill of the movies and books to the gaming world.

This time the storyline revolves around a security technician named Jack Vaughn who works on a third, previously unseen island filled with tons (literally!) of genetically engineered dinos. Of course, it doesn't take long for the situation to go horribly awry leaving you, as Vaughn, to escape from hordes of ravenous reptiles with only the most meager of resources at your disposal. Honestly, you'd think that the people who set

these places up would learn and plan for these disasters better.

The gameplay that evolves from this scenario includes a healthy mix of third-person action, stealth, and a variety of platforming elements. While you'll have to fight off some of the more aggressive island denizens with guns, grenade launchers, and a cattle prod (good luck with that one), a lot of time will be spent navigating environmental puzzles and

dodging dinosaurs that are just too big to take head on.

Survival may be more weighed down than buoyed by the *Jurassic Park* license, but the team knows it's going to take more than pretty dinosaurs to restore gamers' faith. Hopefully, the clever mix of gameplay styles, great-looking dinosaurs, and original story will be just the kick in the pants that the franchise needs. — Blake Fischer



CREATING LIFE

As you can conclude from the screens, the dinosaurs already steal the show (er... game). Believe it or not, they're actually built with fairly small polygon counts — most are less than 1500. The detail comes from some clever texture use, which would seem to be no small feat considering PS2's much maligned lack of VRAM. Keeping everything managed this way, has enabled the team not only to create some huge game levels, but also to get more creatures on screen at once.



■ You'll not only have to outshoot the raptors, but out-think them as well



SCORE 1000

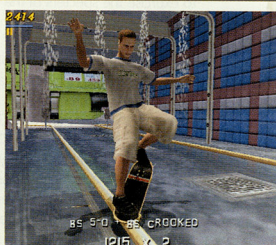
→ Milestones

■ XBOX, PS2, PSX, PC

TONY HAWK'S PRO SKATER 3

■ Publisher: **Activision** ■ Developer: **Neversoft** ■ Release Date: **Winter** ■ Origin: **US**

■ In the version of THPS3 that we got to play, you could hook up with up to three other players and skate in the same level. The best part about multiplayer is that you can also take a shot at anybody who's dumb enough to get close



→ The Hawk is looking better than ever in this, the first game in the series designed from the ground up on a next-generation console. New features include "living" environmental elements such as weather, moving traffic, or pedestrians. As great as it looks, the most exciting thing about the game for us is the fact that all versions but PSX will be playable online. In fact, we've already played the PS2 version online via a USB broadband adapter — no kidding. We expect this to be one of the premier titles for Sony's upcoming online services.



■ The environments are not only bigger and more detailed, but they also feature a lot more scripted events for you to uncover and interact with



■ XBOX

WWF: RAW IS WAR

■ Publisher: **THQ** ■ Developer: **Anchor**

■ Release Date: **Xbox launch** ■ Origin: **Japan**

➔ Wrestling fans are sure to flip over this title, which looks to utilize the graphic capabilities of Xbox with brutally realistic results. The final game will feature over 35 WWF wrestlers and will even incorporate the various wrestlers' trademark introductory pyrotechnics (though the trash talk will hopefully be excised). As incredible as the game looks, it could play just as well; developer Anchor also created the awesome *Ultimate Fighting Championship* for Dreamcast, which earned five stars in **NG 10/00**.



■ The amount of detail in the characters is unreal. Combined with a grappling system from the people who brought us UFC, this could be the ultimate wrestling game



■ The graphical upgrade helps to hide the fact that, for the most part, we've already seen what this game has to offer

■ XBOX

TONY HAWK'S PRO SKATER 2X

■ Publisher: **Activision** ■ Developer: **Treyarch**

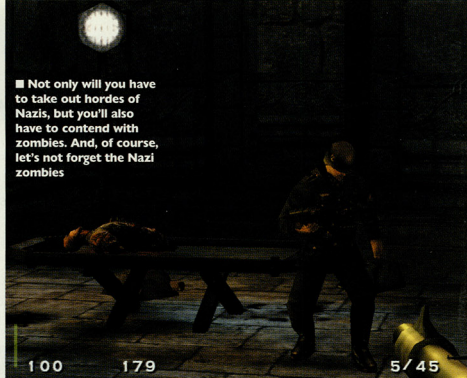
■ Release Date: **Xbox Launch** ■ Origin: **US**

➔ Xbox will have at least one great launch title, though it'll be one that most gamers will already be intimately familiar with. In fact, 2x actually features all of the levels from both *Tony Hawk 1* and 2, as well as three all-new areas. These shots are encouraging, although we think the assets are showing the scars of being ported from a less powerful system. Still, Activision has plenty of time to crank up the quality of the models and textures — which they assure us they are doing — before the Xbox launch.

→ Milestones



■ Not only will you have to take out hordes of Nazis, but you'll also have to contend with zombies. And, of course, let's not forget the Nazi zombies



■ PC

RETURN TO CASTLE WOLFENSTEIN

■ Publisher: **Activision** ■ Developer: **Grey Matter** ■ Release Date: **Q4** ■ Origin: **US**

■ PC, TBA

FIGHTING LEGENDS

■ Publisher: **TBA**
 ■ Developer: **Maximum Charisma**
 ■ Release Date: **November (PC)**
 ■ Origin: **US**

→ This personality-overloaded massively multiplayer action RTS is preparing to go beta in June. Recent additions to the code have incorporated special effects, adding even more color to the mayhem. While the game is only "officially" scheduled for PC, there are rumors that it might make an appearance on one of the next-generation platforms.



■ PLAYSTATION 2

TIME CRISIS II

■ Publisher: **Namco** ■ Developer: **Namco** ■ Release Date: **Fall** ■ Origin: **Japan**



→ Namco's PSOne-only Time Crisis: Project Titan proved something of a letdown (see review, page 86), but if these beautiful, action-filled screens are any indication, the series is firing back with both barrels in this entry. An enhanced port of the awesome arcade machine, this version will add new levels, four bonus games, support for Gun Con and Gun Con 2, and both splitscreen and iLink play.



■ Time Crisis II is generally recognized as one of the best shooters ever made. When you add in the enhanced graphics and iLink play, it becomes a serious consideration for any PS2 library

■ PLAYSTATION 2

MOBILE SUIT GUNDAM: JOURNEY TO JABURO

■ Publisher: **Bandai** ■ Developer: **Bandai** ■ Release Date: **July** ■ Origin: **US**



■ The *Gundam* license (much like *Dragonball Z*) has never had a good game in the United States. Will this be the game that bucks the trend?



➔ While *Gundam* games are legion in Japan — particularly the excellent but very Japanese-market-focused *SD Gundam: Generation* strategy series — very few make it over to the United States. Two exceptions of late are Bandai's recent 2D PlayStation fighter and now this, a 3D action title in the vein of *Armored Core 2*, but whose plot closely follows the original *Gundam* series (currently being broadcast on Cartoon Network).

■ PLAYSTATION 2

RUBU TRIBE

■ Publisher: **Interplay** ■ Developer: **Outrage**

■ Release Date: **Winter** ■ Origin: **US**



■ The world of *Rubu Tribe* looks vast. An early fact sheet seems to indicate that you'll have to make your way through several different environments and weather systems



➔ *Descent 3* creators Outrage take a dramatic turn from their previous efforts with this character-based fantasy-action game. As the leader of a tribe of Rubus (the small gnome-like creatures illustrated in the above screenshots), you must travel on your giant-sized Uut on a quest across the world. Along the way you must care for your Uut, deal with hazards — both creatures and environment-based ones — and keep track of the rest of your tribe.

→ Cover Story





■ **PLAYSTATION 2**

JAK AND DAXTER: THE PRECURSOR LEGACY

■ Publisher: **Sony** ■ Developer: **Naughty Dog** ■ Release Date: **Fall** ■ Origin: **US**

At E3, the creators of *Crash Bandicoot* unleashed their new character-driven game for the first time. Will Naughty Dog's next-generation game be Sony's sales sensation this Christmas?



Very few U.S.-based console game developers have flourished the way Naughty Dog has with its *Crash* series. With every new PlayStation iteration of *Bandicoot*, the company's credibility just continued to skyrocket. Two years ago, Naughty Dog announced it was going to do something entirely new for PS2, and fan-boy speculation has produced billions of bytes of inane text that sits wasting storage space on online forums around the world. So in an effort to cutback on worldwide web server abuse, we visited the Naughty

Dog offices and asked the co-founder/president, Jason Rubin, for ourselves.

"The game is, in a lot of ways, really a mix between *Zelda*, *Mario*, and

Crash," says Rubin, explaining that the massive 3D world requires exploration, as in *Zelda*, while offering some of the same kinds of free-roaming platform



■ This plant monster (left) is the first boss you'll face. Jak on one of his vehicles (right)

→ Cover Story



■ Mark Cerny

"This is not Spyro. This is a new play experience. One truism of videogames is, 'Don't build worlds, build games.' But in fact this is a world as much as it's a game."

— Mark Cerny, consulting designer, Naughty Dog

challenges of Mario. "There is also the Crash element," Rubin adds, "because it will channel you in occasionally for very focused gameplay, which is nice, because Mario sort of loses that — it's so much more about finding your way around and platform jumping. There's

not so much time-based or really dense gameplay."

We're sitting on Naughty Dog's comfortable break room couches. With Dual Shock in hand, Rubin fires up the game on the TV in front of us. Sure enough, there stands the new main character, Jak, looking very Elven with his wild blond hair, pointy ears, and big anime eyes. Perched upon his shoulder is his little, weasel-like companion Daxter. In front of them, a lush 3D world stretches in all directions. There's a cartoon quality to it all, with a bright, Crash-like palette of colors, but the world itself is patterned after classic fantasy elements, not unlike *Final Fantasy*.

"Everything you see here is polygonal," Rubin emphasizes as he slowly turns Jak around on this hilltop vantage point, giving us a panoramic view of the world. Rubin explains that in the distance, we are looking at several different playable areas, bounded by an ocean to one side, ready to be explored and seamlessly interconnected.

"You're looking at somewhere in the order of 10 million polys a second out there," he says, "but they're not just normal polygons. They're lit with time-of-day and level-of-detail information in them. They're very complex polygons. If you don't have level-of-detail information in them, they are a lot cheaper, but as you can see,

there's nothing popping in here."

It should come as no surprise that Naughty Dog is drawing on the strength of its past experience. Like Crash, our new hero has a spin attack. He's prone to breaking boxes for items and power-ups. He'll be forced to dispatch numerous one-hit enemies as well as a few nasty bosses. And of course, he'll take the helm of a few vehicles. But what is surprising is the amount of story the team has worked into the game. Living in the land of the "Precursors" — a technologically advanced race that has long since disappeared — you play as Jak, accompanied by your AI-controlled pal Daxter. As the opening cut scene shows, Daxter wasn't always a weasel; he's



■ Jak often makes some dangerous jumps to platforms; Daxter attempts to help (below)





■ The creatures of Misty Isle (above) are a bit more imposing than those of earlier levels. Below, Jak holds up a newly acquired Power Cell while Daxter celebrates



been transformed by a magical substance called Dark Eco (pronounced EEK-o), and it's up to you, as his friend, to help him get back to normal.

The game starts in your home village, where other inhabitants will talk to you and send you on tasks. (The villagers have been wonderfully animated, and the early sampling of the voice acting that accompanies them is encouraging.) For the most part, the tasks can be completed in any order, but it's likely one of the first jobs you'll get is from the village Mayor, who needs to you restore the supply of Blue Eco. Eco is a magical energy that created the land. It flows through the land, and the only thing that keeps it from sounding exactly the same as "The Force" is that it comes in a variety of colors.

"We have several types of Eco in the game," says Rubin. "Blue Eco is power Eco — operates machinery, etc. Green Eco is health Eco. Yellow is a projectile Eco. Red is a kind of fire Eco, and each one powers you up. You're the only creature in the world that gets powered up by the Eco. It's not really explained why that

"You're looking at somewhere in the order of 10 million polys a second ... but they're not just normal polygons. They're lit with time-of-day and level-of-detail information."

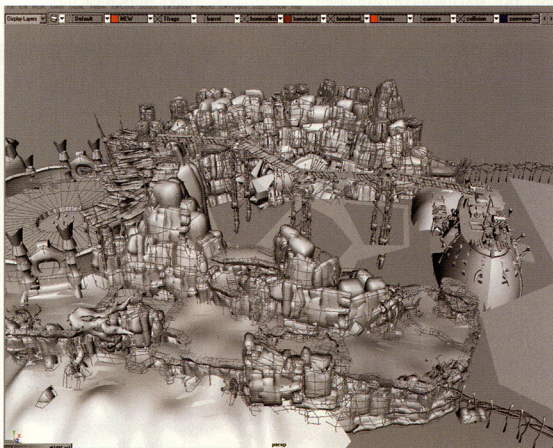
— Jason Rubin, co-founder/president, Naughty Dog

happens, and that's an overriding mystery that may move on to other games as well." And then of course, there's Dark Eco, which has altered Daxter's appearance.

As players explore the world of Jak and Daxter, they'll find Eco plays a very important part in advancing through the game. Rubin shows us a section where, Jak, all powered-up and aglow with Blue Eco, activates a hovering bridge that, moments before, was lying in broken pieces below. The bridge leads to a tower with some narrow

corridors, ledges, and sharp precipices — certainly displaying shades of *Crash*, as it takes some careful jumping to quickly proceed to the next Eco power-up location. There are a number of these time-based challenges that have Jak running to power up elevators and platforms, before his Blue Eco properties wear off.

While Eco may be the elementary force in Jak's world, Power Cells are the currency by which a player progresses to the next village, and ulti-



■ As seen from above, this flat-shaded workstation shot of Misty Isle gives you an idea of just how complex these areas are

→ Cover Story

Daxter's AI gives him a very natural range of motion independent of Jak, and he has his own suite of comical animations.



■ The well-designed supporting characters, like the Mayor here, lend a touch of Disney

mately, the end of the game.

"You need to get 16 Power Cells to power up your vehicle to go through an area called Fire Canyon to get to the next village," says Rubin. "The whole game is set around a village hub system. There's a village like this one, and then around it, there are three or four areas with Power Cells that you need to collect." Obtaining these Power Cells comes from completing major tasks. And while there are plenty of lesser items laid out in chests and other boxes that dot the landscape, the genius in the design of this game comes in how you earn Power Cells. The subtleties of the *Crash* series' designers, Mark Cerny, Evan Wells, and Daniel Arey, are well in evidence, and the three have taken this game to the next level, because

none of the tasks repeat themselves.

"This is not *Spyro*," says Consulting Designer Mark Cerny, who has worked on both the *Crash* and *Spyro* series since their incubation. "This is a new play experience. One of the truisms of videogames is, 'Don't build worlds, build games.' But in fact, this is a world as much as it's a game, and navigating the world and trying to figure out your tasks is the game."

There are Power Cells to collect on every level, resulting in a wide variety of gameplay challenges. Some are time-based, often requiring precise jumping skills, while others require a bit more thought. For example, when a pelican eats one of Jak's hard-earned Power Cells, you must swim out to an island where it is nesting and give it a whack. The blow will force the pelican to spit the Power Cell back to shore, at which point the bird promptly flies off after it. It then becomes a race to shore to retrieve the Cell before the pelican can swallow it again. Other odd tasks include herding yaks and even chasing sea gulls. As you move into more advanced levels of the game, this will include reaching some difficult spots and defeating three bosses.

"The creatures are actually quite intelligent in this game," Rubin explains. "They'll work their way around stuff to come after me. They

also avoid each other properly. Once they've seen me they'll follow me for a good long time. If I do enough walking, because they're kind of slow on this first level, I could probably get half the creatures on this level following me."

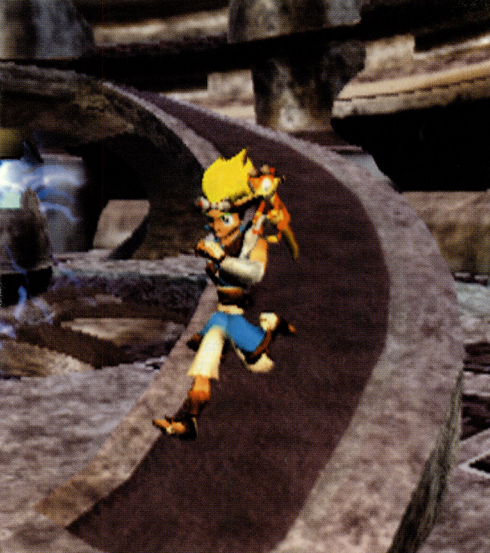
Cerny and Rubin can brag all they want about having moved the game's world into the next generation, but Jak's play mechanics should be very familiar to *Crash*'s 32-bit fans. His general movement is controlled through the left analog stick, and he has a jump, a dash attack, and a spin attack — all of which can be linked for several kinds of attacks, including an uppercut. There's also a crawl, and a roll move that can be linked to a long jump. Players will control vehicles in some parts of the game and even ride the back of a giant, though flightless, baby bird called a Flut-Flut. Rubin explains that the Flut-Flut will serve as speedy ground transportation not unlike the Tauntaun in *Star Wars*.

But it's pretty incredible just watching Jak move. Rubin is justifiably proud of the new animation-blending system developed by his partner, Co-founder/Lead Programmer Andy Gavin. The system takes into consideration changes in the dimensions of the landscape as



■ Fire at will! Defeat the enemy who has been shooting at you with this cannon, and you can take control of the artillery yourself





■ As players cruise the world of Precursors, strange new areas will be revealed. Above, Jak explores a Precursor structure with a device powered by Blue Eco



well as physically modeled properties such as water or a rope bridge.

Gavin explains that the system can and does blend up to 24 different animations, all in realtime. Not unlike the animation seen in Disney's *Tarzan* film, the result is a smoother, more lifelike collection of unbelievable moves — certainly better than any other we've ever seen created for this kind of game thus far. While Daxter has been programmed to stick to Jak, he's not rigidly superglued to Jak's shoulder. Daxter's AI gives him a very natural range of motion independent of Jak, and he has his own suite of comical animations.

Naughty Dog has also done a wonderful job honing the camera. Although the right analog stick can be used to manually adjust the camera and a quick tap of the triangle button shifts the view to Jak's first-person perspective, we rarely needed to bother with the manual camera controls in our demo. During more than an hour-long play session with the game, the camera did a solid job keeping itself where we needed it to be.

Like any game that's still six months from completion, there are plenty of things that have yet to make it into the game. Rubin explains that they still have to add shadows and water effects. Otherwise, he's content with the level of graphic quality.

"We have a system where we can throw an environment map on anything we want environment-mapped," says Rubin. "If we wanted to, we could throw bump maps in

NIGHT AND DAY

Naughty Dog's game boasts a very cool realtime day and night cycle. Two suns run on a six-minute day. Lights come on in the village huts as night falls and dim towards dawn. "It's more of just an atmospheric thing," says Jason Rubin. "We made a very conscious decision not to make any gameplay based upon time, so you wouldn't have to sit around and wait for something to happen."



there too and do all those other things. We just haven't really gotten around to it, because we're going to really start focusing on getting all the gameplay nice and smooth and feeling good. That's more important to us than the bump maps. We've got a good enough engine at this point."

Andy Gavin credits Rubin, "in a cameo return to programming," for the particle system. And, Rubin explains, because their sound designer wasn't working out, he has also assumed some of the sound effects responsibilities for the time being. The first song in the game's soundtrack was scheduled to be implemented just before E3, and Mark Mothersbaugh, the former Devo front man who scored the past *Crash* games, is again composing the soundtrack. But Rubin insists the type of music will be different. And would this be a character-based action

game without multiple endings? Rubin also admits that there'll be more than one.

When looked at as a whole, the high production values and a thoughtful approach to the design gives this game a very polished feel that's part-Disney film, part-*Crash*. In a period where the graphic realism of *Metal Gear Solid 2* or *Gran Turismo 3* seems to be the order of the day, it may be hard for some readers to appreciate the visuals accompanying this piece. But seeing Jak and Daxter in motion, and, more importantly, sitting down and controlling them, is where the proof of pleasure lies. From the meticulous character design to the scope of the world, Naughty Dog's perfectionist nature and dedication to the craft of gameplay should prove that Jak and Daxter will, just as *Crash* did before them, win audiences the

NAUGHTY BY NATURE

After two years of secretly sniffing out PlayStation 2, Naughty Dog co-founders Andy Gavin and Jason Rubin are finally barking about it

→ The Naughty Dog break room is host to a number of classic arcade machines, all in mint condition.

Pointing to the pristine *Joust* cabinet, Jason Rubin mentions that at age 12, he and fellow Naughty Dog co-founder Andy Gavin took off in the middle of Rubin's own bar mitzvah to play *Joust* at a local pizza parlor. You might say the writing was on the wall way back then. From their suburban childhood in Virginia to the 34-employee development studio they head in Los Angeles, one might say the success story is complete. They have created one of the 32-bit era's most recognized characters and have left an indelible pawprint on the pages of videogame history. But don't tell that to these two. They work just as hard — if not harder — now than they did when they made their first game together, *Ski Crazy*, for the Apple II back in 1986.

Next Generation: In the life of the Crash series, Crash was, as a character, designed to appeal to audiences in the U.S., Japan, and Europe. How did your new characters, Jak and Daxter, evolve?

Jason Rubin: We had our Japanese producers, the same producers that worked with us on the entire *Crash* series, here continually, and we were emailing and faxing character sketches back and forth to them. Likewise we had European producers coming in and looking at stuff. So we were convinced, that from the production side at least, this character is the right one for all

the territories. America in a lot of ways is pretty easy, because we're all American, and we also have direct contact with our American producers.

NG: Sounds time-consuming...

JR: Jak took longer than Crash to design. Crash took three months. Jak took more like five. We went through a lot of iterations, and we had some false directions as well.

Andy Gavin: For a long time we were running around the game with the 'temporary' character.

JR: But when our producers took this character to their marketing department in Japan and did their first presentation of the character, Japan said, 'This guy is awesome. This is our big thing for Christmas. This is definitely a big guy for us.' It seems that they feel this guy has that Crash magic — that it can work in other territories, and likewise for Europe as well.

NG: So what really makes Jak different from Crash?

JR: He's a little older than Crash. You don't feel like you're playing a young character. He doesn't speak much either, so you don't feel like you're playing Gex, and you don't want to play that character — you don't feel turned off by it. At the same time, we have the somewhat Crash-like, but far more outspoken, Daxter along for the ride.

And he will say a lot — make a lot of jokes. It's very Disney-esque, like the Genie in *Aladdin*. You know, *Aladdin* is a pretty deadpan character. It's the Genie who gets focused on, and if he says something that's not so funny, you can kick him. It's not you, so it doesn't break that connection between the player and the character.

NG: So you've built this game to skew a bit older?

AG: It skews a bit older, but the cartoony look appeals to a broader demographic, and we hope it has cross-gender appeal. We're hoping that with this style, we get both.

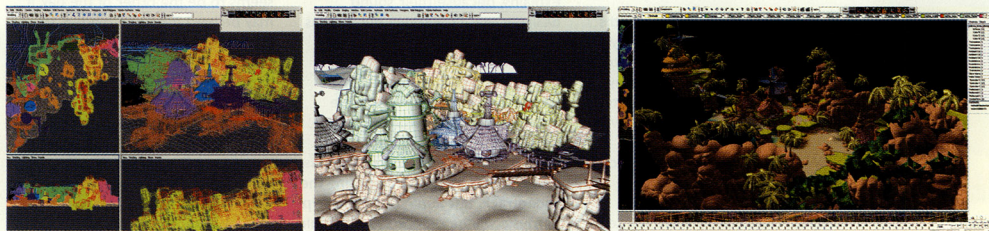
JR: We're dealing with a much older audience than we're used to hitting in the videogame console market. And I still think there's a validity to these character-action games, but I don't think you can go out there with "Wuzzles the Wombat" or whatever and suddenly turn around and gain a lot of popularity with older people. Even Crash might have a hard time now, because the age group is really that much older.

NG: Andy, can you tell us about GOAL, the new programming language you wrote for this project?

AG: GOAL stands for Game-Oriented Assembly LISP. It's a game language designed to integrate higher-level, gameplay-oriented language concepts and assembly at the same time. It is specifically designed for PlayStation 2, so it supports all of PS2's various processors. So you can use the vector units at any time and pretty efficiently. Conventional languages don't tend to use those extra processors, and so programmers will leave them uninitialized

"This isn't our slammed-together first-generation engine. We've written and rewritten in order to make a third-generation engine on our first-generation game."

— Andy Gavin



■ While all of Naughty Dog's tools are custom designed by them, they still use some off-the-shelf 3D modeling software such as MAYA (shown above)



■ photos by Michael Mueller

■ Andy Gavin (left) and Jason Rubin

→ Cover Story

because it's difficult to use them, so GOAL's really designed to take advantage of the non-conventional hardware.

NG: And the other programmers on staff like using it?

AG: They all use it. They have mixed opinions about it [laughs]. Overall it's a complex thing. It has a tremendous amount of power, but it's different because it's not a professional product. It's a little buggy. Like all the rest of our tools, it is a little challenging to use, but it helps us squeeze all the power we get out of PlayStation 2.

NG: Are all your tools custom-made?

AG: Everything in this game is completely custom, which has always been the Naughty Dog way. We make all our tools, our language, our pipeline, our path, everything, which is a double-edged sword. It's super-powerful, but it also means everything you use is weird, complex, buggy — because you're writing it at the same time you're writing the game. On this game, we've designed, thrown out, and redesigned on a technical level more than any other we've ever done.

NG: And you're constantly fixing the bugs in the tool?

AG: We're continually fixing them. I mean, there's positive progress, but you can't keep up.

NG: Theoretically, you'll fix them all before the game ships and you'll have a complete suite of tools.

AG: Yeah, it makes sequels and similar games easier. Sequels like *Crash 2* and *Crash 3* were all about new gameplay, and the engine was a bit better. We throw in all this new stuff and can do so relatively fast. But the first game takes forever because you have to build your whole infrastructure.

NG: So your next PS2 game will be turned around much faster?

AG: Definitely. It won't be turned around lickety-split, because there's a lot of stuff you have to put in. But it will be a lot easier and faster because this isn't our slammed-together first-generation engine. We've written and rewritten in order to make a third-generation engine on our first-generation game.

NG: The theme of rewriting code and reworking assets seemed to come up a few times today as you were showing the

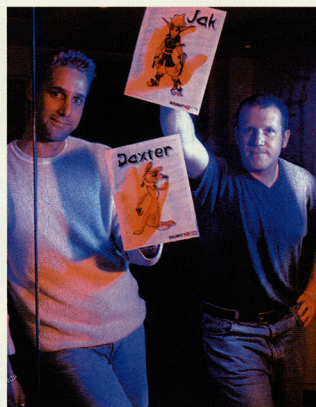
game. Are you a team of perfectionists?

AG: It just sucks when you do it the first time. It sucks when you do it the second time. It only 'sorta sucks' when you do it the third time.

JR: You learn as you go through it.

NG: Now that your company has been bought by Sony, has anything changed?

JR: No. We still work with exactly the same people. From a structure standpoint, Andy



"Sony owns this character.... He's not going to run off to Xbox and bad ports, or whatever."

— Jason Rubin

and I still run the show here, and we still have to answer to our producers. There's a lot of reasons that we did the transaction, but none of them had to do with changing the structure of how we made games around here. The guys have better stereos because they can go to the Sony store now. That's about the only real change.

AG: It was always a very tightly combined effort...

NG: What about the intellectual property rights?

JR: Sony owns this character. There won't be any issues [like there were with *Crash*] with trying to negotiate with a group that says they can do PR for a character and says they can do marketing, but then doesn't do it. That won't happen because Sony has complete control — he's not

going to run off to Xbox and bad ports, or whatever.

NG: And financially?

JR: We also know we are going to have the funding for whatever we need to do to make the best game we can. The budgets are significantly more than they were. This game will cost more than all *Crashes* combined, which is typical in the industry. It's not that this game is flying way over budget or we're spending way too much money on it. We've had 34 people working for two full years on this project, and three programmers who worked three years. You compare that to *Crash 3*, which took nine months and four days to complete with 18 people. It's night and day in terms of cost.

NG: And certainly you were well compensated in the sale?

JR: We did very well. Sony was very good to us, but at the same time, it's still about making games for us. Our lives won't change until we're done with making product and we can actually take the time to enjoy it. Andy and I, and Mark Cerny joined this industry early enough that we saw that games could be an equal medium to movies. And I hate that stat says that games are bigger than movies. It's total crap — you can debunk it in a second. We're not even close yet. But we're getting there, and this is the generation where it becomes interesting, where we're actually doing things from an artistic standpoint. We're getting across the point that we can create worlds and we can create emotion in games. We've come a long way.

NG: So what's next for Naughty Dog?

JR: I think for a little while, we'll stick with one title at a time. Maybe at some point here, we'll start to get a second title going. I'd like to stick with this character. I hope the public likes him. You know, that really is going to determine everything, right?

NG: It is hard to believe that you'll invest five months developing a character and not want to use him over multiple titles.

JR: Absolutely. But that decision is going to be made by the gamers. If they don't like the character, it's not worth spending the time developing the next game, regardless of how much we save on character development.

AG: You never want to do the sequel to the failed mascot character. I won't name their names, but you know them. **NextGen**



■ Believe it or not, this is the actual size of Game Boy Advance

Still in the game Game Boy Advances

After nearly 12 years, Nintendo's Game Boy is retiring. There's an heir to the throne, but do you really need a new handheld console?

→ Telling someone that Nintendo has a decent share of the handheld gaming market is like saying Tiger Woods isn't a bad golfer. Back in the fall of 1989, however, things weren't so certain. The original 8-bit Game Boy debuted with a tiny, black-and-white screen that lacked any backlighting. When compared to Atari's upcoming Lynx, which cost \$40 more but added a 16-bit processor and a full-color, backlit screen, Game Boy seemed behind the technology curve. And when both Sega and NEC announced full-color portable systems of their own (Game Gear and TurboExpress, respectively), Game Boy looked doomed.

Over a decade later, Nintendo remains the undisputed king of portable gaming, and Game Boy (and its iterations) is easily the most successful console of all time.

Still, while Game Boy made sitting on an airplane or even waiting in line at the DMV tolerable, we've always considered it a compromised form of gaming, more time-filler than fulfilling. But Game Boy Advance is proof that things are getting better. While it isn't the hardware leap we'd hoped for, Nintendo has taken strides toward making handheld gaming a viable choice for the hardcore.

Under the Hood:

- Screen:** Reflective TFT Color LCD
Screen dimensions: 40.8 mm x 61.2 mm
- Resolution:** 240 x 160 pixels
Display 32,000 colors
- CPU:** 16 MHz 32-bit RISC-CPU + 8-bit CISC-CPU
- Memory:** 32KB WRAM + 96KB VRAM + 256KB WRAM
- Sound:** mono speakers, stereo headphones
- Multiplayer:** up to four GBA, two GB/GBC
- Power:** two AA batteries, or battery pak
- Battery life:** 15 hours for batteries, 10 for pak
- Dimensions:** 82 mm x 144.5 mm x 24.5 mm (L x W x H)
- Release Date:** June 11, 2001
- Price:** \$99.99

→ Rating the system

Hardware Power:

Actually, we expected a lot more from Nintendo in this category. It's a step up from GBC, to be sure, but we had hoped for a 3D graphics processor and a backlit screen. (Yes, we know they eat batteries. We still want one.) And if the SNES controller had room for four face buttons, there's no reason not to make room for them here.

NextGen ★★☆☆☆

Current Software:

As usual, Nintendo's hardware is saved by awesome software. Backwards compatibility with GBC, top-notch versions of *Tony Hawk*, *Chu Chu Rocket*, and other current franchises, combined with enhanced ports of timeless classics like *Super Mario Bros. 2* and *Super Dodge Ball* have given the system a sensational launch lineup.

NextGen ★★★★★

Peripherally Speaking

Third-party peripheral manufacturers are already piling up mountains of support for Game Boy Advance. Here's a quick sample of what's out there.

GBA Worm Light
by Nyko (\$9.99)



Bumper GBX protective overlay
by Interact (\$9.99)



**Cobra Power Plus
Advance power pack**
by Nuby (\$19.99)



GBA Shock 'N' Rock
by Nyko (\$24.99)

Light & Magnifier
by MadCatz (\$9.99)



Light Shield
by Pelican (\$9.99)



Sport Shell Hardshell case by Interact (\$14.99)



The Color of Money

One of the more unusual phenomena in the game industry is the undeniable fact that consoles, particularly Nintendo's, see a spike in sales every time they become available in additional colors. With Game Boy Advance, Nintendo is anticipating this trend and will offer the console in four different hues right from the start. The company also boasts a penchant for renaming standard colors with more elaborate names. A quick translation guide is below:

GBA COLOR	REAL COLOR
Arctic	White
Indigo	Blue
Glacier	Clear Blue
Fuschia	Clear Pink



Future Software:

Given the rabid support GBC currently enjoys from a vast horde of third parties, there's no doubt GBA will have an extensive library. Only time will tell, however, if Nintendo can balance the inevitable deluge of licensed kiddie titles with enough games that appeal to those of us who no longer take naps after recess. If a stubborn Mr. Yamauchi's refusal to work with Square (subsequently denying us any *Final Fantasy* GBA games) is any indication, it's not as likely.

Marketing Muscle:

It almost doesn't matter. Nintendo's legions of fans are rabid in their devotion, and those who aren't yet onboard will easily be swayed by a few well-placed TV ads. A couple commercials during the *Pokémon* cartoon, and it'll fly off the shelves, just as Game Boy Color still does. Add to that the fact that there really isn't another serious player in the handheld space (except Game Boy Color), and it becomes clear that Nintendo doesn't need to do much to sell millions of units.

Bottom Line:

Despite the fact that the original *Doom* will run on the new *Cassiopeia* (a Palm handheld competitor that runs under Windows CE), Nintendo's hardware half-step remains the only real handheld game in town. The GBA won't last 11 years, but we're intrigued to see how it will perform together with GameCube. Regardless of any added next-generation functionality, if you're ready for new handheld games, it's well worth a hundred bucks.

Around the small world of Game Boy Advance

We've compiled this A to Z list of games for GBA, including reviews of all 20 launch titles and previews of 58 games to come. As you probably expect, there's more than a few games targeting younger gamers (a.k.a. derivative, license-based drivel) but there's also a few early games on this list that are potential diamonds in the rough. No matter what you're looking for, you should find something here to your liking.



AERIAL ACES

Publisher: Majesco
Developer: PipeDream Interactive
Release Date: Summer

A simulated 3D dogfighting game that puts the player in first-person perspective behind the yoke of a classic fighter plane from the era of barnstorming (the actual act, not Activision's 2600 game).

BATMAN: VENGEANCE

Publisher: Ubi Soft
Developer: Ubi Soft
Release Date: October



A portable version of Ubi Soft's awesome-looking PS2 title (previewed last issue), though it appears the sneak-'em-up gameplay is going to be confined to two dimensions.

BONX

Publisher: Ubi Soft
Developer: Planet Interactive
Release Date: November



Ubi describes this quirky, cross-genre title as a racing combat game in which players must battle each other to the

finish line using bombs, missiles, and shields, while avoiding traps and roaming enemies. The retro-hip isometric graphics and arcade-style gameplay are being designed to appeal specifically to gamers who remember playing classic arcade games.

BREATH OF FIRE ADVANCE

Publisher: Capcom
Developer: Capcom
Release Date: September



Capcom is dusting off several

of its classics for GBA, including this, a (slightly) renamed version of the original *Breath of Fire*, a classic RPG released for SNES back in 1994. RPGs are very rare on GBA, so you'll want this one.

BROKEN SWORD: SHADOW OF THE TEMPLARS

Publisher: TBA
Developer: Revolution
Release Date: TBA



A recently announced port of the PSOne version of this

excellent adventure game, one of very few titles able to compare with LucasArts' classic adventures. That handheld gamers care about an adventure game is questionable, and a U.S. publisher may be slow in coming.

CAESAR'S PALACE

Publisher: Majesco
Developer: PipeDream Interactive
Release Date: Fall

The requisite casino simulation, featuring Video Poker, Blackjack, Craps, Roulette, Video Horse Racing, and Keno. The casino simulation is now so complete you can even visit the ATM, just as you would if you were losing big at the real Caesar's.



ARMY MEN ADVANCE

■ **Publisher:** 3DO ■ **Developer:** DC Studios

The first thing we noticed about this game was its bright, comical art style, which actually works quite well. The game itself is a 2D variation on the traditional *Army Men* shooter formula, not unlike a top-down, free-roaming *Metal Slug* (with a slower pace) or the original *Castle Wolfenstein*. The first level is pretty bland, and gameplay is marred slightly by the enemy soldiers' tendency to position themselves directly to the side of a doorway, giving them at free shot at you as you walk in. Otherwise, it's actually pretty fun.

NextGen ★★★★★

Bottom Line: A decent, if not amazing, game, at least until Capcom gives us that GBA version of *Commando* we've been dreaming about.



BOMBERMAN TOURNAMENT

■ **Publisher:** Activision ■ **Developer:** Hudson Soft

This one isn't coming out day-and-date with the system, but be sure to go back for it — it's a must-have. Besides being a linkable, four-player entry in the now classic *Bomberman* franchise, this game adds a Quest mode, which puts Bomberman on a *Zelda*-style quest to find a missing comrade. To complement your explosive armament, you'll find yourself collecting cute little monsters called Karabon and coaching them in battles with other Karabon trainers. In this post-Pikachu age, we'd expect nothing less.



NextGen ★★★★★

Bottom Line: An established multiplayer classic whose added single-player mode mixes in two of Nintendo's most beloved franchises.

DARK ARENA

Publisher: Majesco
Developer: Graphic State Limited
Release Date: June



One of the most surprising things about GBA's software lineup is the number of first-person shooters already in development for the system. In this one, the player must survive a futuristic military training camp that has been taken over by genetically engineered warriors.

DAVE MIRRA FREESTYLE BMX 2

Publisher: Acclaim
Developer: Z-Axis
Release Date: December



Acclaim's excellent Tony Hawk-on-a-bike franchise moves into the handheld realm. However, if the GBA version of Activision's Mat Hoffman's Pro BMX turns out as brilliantly as Tony Hawk's Pro Skater 2 did, this title will face a steep uphill ride.

DEXTER'S LABORATORY

Publisher: bantl entertainment
Developer: VirtuaCraft
Release Date: November



We expect this title to skew young, as it features Cartoon Network's intolerant under-aged mad scientist Dexter, subduing robots, aliens, slime monsters, and clones of his sister Dee Dee. But we're told the six mini-games hearken back to classics like Pac-Man and Qix, so we're optimistic.

DOOM

Publisher: Activision
Developer: TBA
Release Date: TBA



Though details are scarce, Activision has announced that the original Doom, in all its glory, is definitely coming to GBA. Whether it can be done justice on a portable remains to be seen, as developers are only just now figuring out how to produce a respectable FPS on a full-sized console, and the control scheme will be a concern. But we'll be first in line to check it out.

DRIVEN

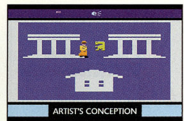
Publisher: bantl entertainment
Developer: Crawfish Interactive
Release Date: October



An isometric racer based upon the recent Stallone-fueled motion picture. It can't be much worse than sitting through the movie again.

E.T.: THE EXTRA-TERRESTRIAL

Publisher: NewKiCo International
Developer: Fluid Studios
Release Date: September



An adventure title in which the player will control both E.T. and Elliot in their quest to build a phone and remember the area code in the Andromeda Galaxy. Luckily, this is being marketed to a younger demographic: Nobody old enough to remember the legendarily awful (though unrelated) Atari 2600 game would buy it.

CASTLEVANIA: CIRCLE OF THE MOON

Publisher: Konami Developer: Konami

Without a doubt, Castlevania: COTM is one of the best 2D action-adventure games ever made — for any platform. The side-scrolling, whip-swinging platform action is fine-tuned to perfection; the graphics are simply gorgeous, if a little dark at times — be sure to play this one directly under a bright light; and the music stands out as an early testament to what can be achieved with the GBA sound chip. Sure, the plot is the same as it's always been — fight Dracula and his minions — but the game structure involves awesome bosses, an incredibly deep power-up system that enables you to explore farther into the huge castle map with each enhancement (Metroid-style), and even some RPG-like leveling and equipping.

NextGen ★★★★★

Bottom Line: If you own a GBA you MUST have this game.



CHU CHU ROCKET ADVANCE

Publisher: Sega Developer: Sega



Chu Chu Rocket is Sega's first GBA title and, as you might expect, it's an extremely playable premier effort. Players must place arrows on a grid and guide the mindless, mouse-like chus to their ships while avoiding the pits and cats in the way. The realtime version of this was the main draw of the Dreamcast version, but it doesn't quite work for the portable revision — blame it on the controls. Instead, now the main draw is the Puzzle mode, which features hundreds — literally hundreds — of maps to solve with a minimal amount of arrows that must be laid in advance. These'll keep you playing for dozens of hours.

NextGen ★★★★★

Bottom Line: As a brainteaser it's well worth the money, but multiplayer suffers.

EARTHWORM JIM

Publisher: Majesco Developer: Game Titan

Earthworm Jim is an enigma. On one hand, it does a lot of things right: The graphics are great; the levels are wonderfully varied; and even the sound is decent. Plus, the game practically bleeds personality — what other title enables the player to control a worm wearing a spacesuit and wielding a ray gun? Unfortunately, all of the style and glamour in the world can't cover for the fact that there are some issues with the game's control: Namely, there's a strange delay when jumping. When the primary form of action is side-scrolling platform stuff, this kind of flaw proves to be seriously annoying. Luckily, aside from some cheap hits, missed dodges, and blind jumps, everything else is pretty fun.

NextGen ★★★★★

Bottom Line: A good port of a fun, if flawed, game.



F-ZERO: MAXIMUM VELOCITY

■ Publisher: **Nintendo** ■ Developer: **Nintendo**

Another of Nintendo's well-chosen reworkings of classic Super Nintendo titles, *F-Zero* is best described as *Wipeout*, version 0.5. The graphics sacrifice detail for velocity, granting the game a very quick framerate and a great sensation of speed, but the various courses are nearly featureless. The game also offers linked play, but that has become almost a prerequisite for GBA racing games. However, it's one of four racing titles available at launch, and it fits a peculiar niche. It's not as cute as Konami's *Krazy Racer* (or September's eagerly awaited *Mario Kart*); THQ's *GT Advance* is easier to pick up and play; and Kemco's *Top Gear GT Championship* is much prettier, though quite inferior.

■ NextGen ★★★★★



Bottom Line: A classic SNES racer that ports well, although the look is definitely dated.

FIRE PRO WRESTLING

■ Publisher: **bam! entertainment** ■ Developer: **Spike**



A near-legendary series in Japan, *Fire Pro Wrestling* immediately dominates the "most mind-bogglingly comprehensive handheld wrestling game ever" category. Choose from more than 150 wrestlers, or construct your own. Game modes are similarly countless, enabling the player to select the rules, number of participants, and structure of the fights (including a four-player Battle Royale mode), though the lack of a career mode impacts longevity. Also, while the fighting engine is *Street Fighter* deep and even boasts a locational damage model, there's little other technical achievement here. The sprites are small and bland, and the audio is rudimentary.

■ NextGen ★★★★★

Bottom Line: Those who brave the steep learning curve will discover a fighting engine of uncanny depth. The problem is, only a determined few are likely to ever get that far

GT ADVANCE CHAMPIONSHIP RACING

■ Publisher: **THQ** ■ Developer: **MTO**

We were pleasantly surprised by this one. Other GBA racing games look better, or boast a legendary heritage, but *GT Advance* is the closest thing to *Ridge Racer* we've ever played on a handheld, and that means it's a lot of fun. There are 48 upgradeable cars and 32 tracks to unlock. You can also use the link cable to challenge up to three human opponents. There are also weak points. Some tracks are too short. The sounds and graphics are passable at best. And collision physics are a bit odd: Other cars tend to bounce when you collide with them, and it's easy for your car to get stuck on the track's side walls if you scrape one. But the solid gameplay makes up for much of this.

■ NextGen ★★★★★

Bottom Line: This title has the best feel of any racing game at launch. But it ain't pretty.



ECKS VS. SEVER

Publisher: **bam! entertainment**
Developer: **Crawfish Interactive**
Release Date: **November**



This first-person shooter is based upon a film slated to hit theaters in summer of 2002. The game will feature multiple play modes and up to four linked players slaying security guards, SWAT team members, and NSA agents.

ESPN CHAMPIONSHIP GOLF 2002

Publisher: **Konami**

Developer: **Konami**

Release Date: **August**



We've been fond of golf games since the first time we fired up *Leader Board* on the old C-64. And with a focus on realism, five courses, 14 golfers with different attributes, and four-player link play, this one looks to be worth checking out.

ESPN X GAMES SKATEBOARDING

Publisher: **Konami**

Developer: **Konami**

Release Date: **September**



While we certainly can't begrudge Konami for leveraging its ESPN license to create a skateboarding game, it has to be said: Based upon the dismal performance of company's existing ESPN-branded videogames, this title is unlikely to be much competition for *Tony Hawk's Pro Skater 2*.

F-14 TOMCAT GBA

Publisher: **Majesco**
Developer: **Virtuacraft Limited**
Release Date: **July**



An aerial dogfighting sim in which the player controls the U.S. Navy's own F-14 Tomcat. Challenging your aerial supremacy are MIG 29s, MIG 24s, and up to three other human players.

FINAL FIGHT (TENTATIVE TITLE)

Publisher: **Capcom**

Developer: **Capcom**

Release Date: **August**



Somewhere in the crime-infested streets of Metro City, the notorious gang known as the Mad Gear have kidnapped Mayor Mike Haggard's daughter. It's up to Haggard and his buddies Guy and Cody to get her back in this arcade classic from 1989. Yee Haw! Time to go kick some ass, old-school style.

FORTRESS

Publisher: **Majesco**

Developer: **PipeDream Interactive**

Release Date: **July**



This bizarre puzzle title takes the basic concept of established uber-game *Tetris*, and adds a dose of *Scorched Earth/Worms*-style artillery fire. You construct a fort out of descending blocks, and when the occasional cannon floats down, use it to blast the walls of your opponents' fortress into smithereens.

FROGGER

Publisher: Konami
Developer: Konami
Release Date: Fall

Konami recently reclaimed its rights to this old arcade standby, and given the financial success of Hasbro Interactive's Frogger titles, it's no surprise they chose to take one more run through the lily pond. Look for an isometric viewpoint, at least 15 levels, and characters ranging from a Cajun Toad to a "biker" gang composed of mosquitos.

HARRY POTTER AND THE SORCERER'S STONE

Publisher: Electronic Arts
Developer: Know Wonder
Release Date: Fall



As might be predicted by the title, this action puzzler closely follows the storyline of the first Harry Potter book, chronicling the young sorcerer's admission into Hogwarts School of Witchcraft. We admit to liking the stories, so if the game play works, we'll take it.

HIGH HEAT MAJOR LEAGUE BASEBALL 2002

Publisher: 3DO
Developer: Moebius Entertainment
Release Date: July



The best-playing baseball game available for every other platform looks to become the best baseball game on GBA, though it won't arrive at launch as hoped. Available features include updated 2001 rosters, each team's home ballpark, and five different play modes.

HOT POTATO!

Publisher: bambi entertainment
Developer: Pukka Games
Release Date: June



A kiddie title in which players must guide shipwrecked potatoes from space back to their rocket ship. We'd be lying if we said we weren't slightly interested, but it looks

like the puzzles in this one might be a bit primitive for our tastes.

JIMMY NEUTRON, BOY GENIUS

Publisher: THQ
Developer: Awe
Release Date: Q4



Little has been revealed so far about this title, other than that it's based upon an upcoming CG-animated feature and TV series about a boy genius and his robotic dog. The property was created by Steve Oedekirk, whose screenwriting credits include Ace Ventura, The Nutty Professor, and Patch Adams.

JURASSIC PARK III: THE DNA FACTOR

Publisher: Konami
Developer: Konami
Release Date: July



Set to release alongside the

movie's opening, we suspect this one may be shooting for younger audiences. It combines side-scrolling platform play with a Puzzle mode that recombines found DNA to unlock additional dinos. There are purportedly over 12 levels and 10 species to discover.

JURASSIC PARK III: PARK BUILDER

Publisher: Konami
Developer: Konami
Release Date: September



The second Jurassic Park III GBA title takes a page from Bullfrog's book and plunks the player down into a dinosaur-themed version of Sim Theme Park. The player must construct the park's shops and attractions while simultaneously making sure that over 100 dinosaurs are discovered, cared for, and properly caged. We wouldn't be surprised to see this one (as well as Jurassic Park III: Primal Fear) show up on other consoles as well. It's a good idea.

JURASSIC PARK III: PRIMAL FEAR

Publisher: Konami
Developer: Mobile 21
Release Date: November



Konami's third GBA game based upon the Jurassic Park III license — never say Konami doesn't know how to milk a franchise — is an action-heavy title that looks similar to an isometric Dino Crisis 2.

KLONOA: EMPIRE OF DREAMS

Publisher: Namco
Developer: Namco
Release Date: July



Namco's original Klonoa was an under-appreciated gem on PlayStation, and while the upcoming PS2 sequel is ultimately still a 2D platformer, it's beautiful and full of character. We're eager to try this all-new handheld entry, which boasts over 35 levels.



IRIDION 3D

Publisher: Majesco Developer: Team of Shin'en



Iridion 3D wants to be a classic shooter on rails, and it's got plenty of the right ingredients. The music is great, the action tense, and the colorful Mode 7 graphics range from detailed to amazing and look almost exactly like real 3D. However, the game is crippled by a single, fatal flaw: The camera follows directly behind your ship, almost as if it's being towed. And your view is big. The result is that your own ship constantly blocks your view of what's ahead of you, be it enemies, bullets, or a mountain.

NextGen ★★★★★

Bottom Line: This beautiful game would be a must-buy in first-person view, but as it is, it's nearly unplayable.

KONAMI KRAZY RACER

Publisher: Konami Developer: Konami

This surprising title's greatest strength is also its greatest weakness: It's a near-carbon copy of Mario Kart Advance, complete with cutesy characters dropped into a solid kart racing engine and colorful, creative track designs, and link support for four racers. It doesn't offer much new to the experience, however, so we find it hard to recommend that kart fans abandon Nintendo's seminal Mario Kart in favor of this new entry. It will be there at launch though, and Mario's stuck at the DMV 'til September.



NextGen ★★★★★

Bottom Line: Mario Kart is coming, but this will easily keep you occupied until it arrives. And for some time after, too.

→ GBA Games

LADY SIA

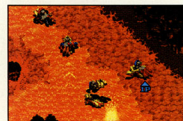
Publisher: TDK Mediactive
Developer: RFX Interactive
Release Date: August



A colorful side-view platform adventure detailing the exploits of a warrior princess battling to save her kingdom from a race of beast men. Sia can also change into a giant sasquatch to go toe to toe with boss creatures.

LEGO BIONICLE — TALES OF THE TONGUA

Publisher: Lego Media
Developer: Saffire
Release Date: September



This interesting Polynesian-themed quest has a more mature look and feel than typical Lego games, but keeps with the Lego theme: The main character is a robotic islander and can exchange body parts at will to gain new

capabilities. This one may be worth a play: the graphics are like claymation, and the in-game atmosphere is appealing.

LEGO ISLAND 2: THE BRICKSTER'S REVENGE

Publisher: Lego Media
Developer: Silicon Dreams
Release Date: September



Youngsters might love the chance to zip around on their skateboards trying to catch the Brickster and playing 18 various mini-games. Discerning gamers will likely find this one a bit simplistic.

LEGO RACERS 3

Publisher: Lego Media
Developer: Pocket Studios
Release Date: September



The best-selling Lego game to date gets a sequel in this arcade-style racer: The

raceways look to offer plenty of variety, ranging from the surface of Mars to a dinosaur-infested island and a futuristic domed city. This'll skew young, but we love the way the cars break up into Lego blocks when they crash.

M&M'S FUN PACK

Publisher: Simon & Schuster
Developer: Simon & Schuster
Release Date: October

A licensed, M&M's-themed board game with four-player link-up and a very young target market. We strongly suspect we'd rather spend our money on real M&M's.

MARIO KART ADVANCE

Publisher: Nintendo
Developer: Nintendo
Release Date: August



Easily one of the most eagerly anticipated GBA games, this is essentially a perfect port of the SNES classic, complete with four-player link-up capability. Even today, when a new kart racer arrives every week, this is the benchmark.

MAT HOFFMAN'S PRO BMX

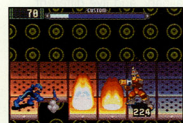
Publisher: Activision
Developer: HotGen
Release Date: Fall



Although features have yet to be announced for this two-wheeled stunt contest, expect them to closely parallel those of the PlayStation version.

MEGA MAN EXE

Publisher: Capcom
Developer: Capcom
Release Date: July



In this peculiar title, Mega Man is basically the main character's Pokémon. Players do their exploring from an isometric perspective, and turn-based battles take place on grids. The Japanese version features four-player link support as well, though that feature may not make it into the version that's released in the U.S.

MEN IN BLACK

Publisher: Crave
Developer: David A. Palmer Production
Release Date: Q3



A 2D adventure based upon the successful MIB cartoon series. Players can control J or K, or they can link up to play both, and they'll have full command of the MIB's futuristic arsenal of weapons, including the noisy cricket and a freezer gun.

MONSTER RANCHER 2 GO

Publisher: Tecmo
Developer: Tecmo
Release Date: Summer



Given the success of certain other monster breeding titles in the handheld market, it makes sense to release a GBA version of Monster Rancher 2. The features have all been preserved, and it looks very similar to the 3D original.



NAMCO MUSEUM

■ Publisher: Namco ■ Developer: Mass Media

This title features five of Namco's most beloved arcade classics: *Galaxian*, *Ms. Pac-Man*, *Galaga*, *Dig Dug*, and *Pole Position* (often credited to Atari, the game's U.S. manufacturer). The emulation is perfect, though GBA's mono speaker warps the timbre of the occasional sound effect. However, a few complications arise from the fact that these games were designed for arcade cabinets, while GBA's screen is just over an inch and a half in height. Thus, crucial game elements like the dots in *Ms. Pac-Man* and the projectiles in *Galaxian* become teeny, tiny little specks.

NextGen★★★★☆

Bottom Line: If you can actually see it, you'll love it.

PINOBBEE: WINGS OF ADVENTURE

■ Publisher: Activision ■ Developer: Artoon/Hudson Soft

This charming little platformer is the story of a plucky little robotic bee who just wants to be a real, live bee. The game is designed by former members of Sega's Sonic Team, and it shows: Elements from the *Sonic* series and *Nights* are everywhere. Pinobee collects things, has a dash attack, and occasionally gets shot out of cannons. The game actually grew on us. It looks good; it has personality; and the levels are nice. But it can't compete with *Rayman* or *Castlevania*, and a true *Sonic* game is coming.



NextGen★★★★☆

Bottom Line: A cute but ultimately underachieving entry in an already crowded market.

PAC-MAN COLLECTION

Publisher: Namco
Developer: Namco
Release Date: July



This cart is actually four games in one: the classic Pac-Man Arcade, the Tetris-derived puzzler Pac-Attack, the slightly isometric Pac-Mania, and the cryptically titled Pac-Man Arrangement, which literally enables the player to adjust maze layout, ghost placement, etc.

POKEMON ADVANCED

Publisher: Nintendo
Developer: Nintendo
Release Date: TBA

If you honestly thought Nintendo would abandon this wildly popular franchise with a move to a new console, we've got a Weedle we'd like to trade you for your Charizard. Little has been revealed, but look for new Pokémon, a new main character, and the same strangely comprehensive battle system. Also new (at least in Japan) will be a card reader peripheral that will enable players to retrieve information from specially manufactured trading cards.

POWER RANGERS TIME FORCE

Publisher: THQ
Developer: Vicarious Visions
Release Date: Fall



We're naturally quite skeptical of a Power Rangers title, but this one is being developed by Vicarious Visions, which is also responsible for the flatly awe-inspiring GBA version of Tony Hawk's Pro Skater 2. So there's hope.

POWERPUFF GIRLS

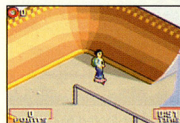
Publisher: bant! entertainment
Developer: VIS/Asylum
Release Date: September



Mojo Jojo, the most evil monkey in the world, is using stolen jewels to create terrible monsters, and it's up to Cartoon Network's hip pre-teen power trio to save the day. Beware: We're thinking this one's aimed directly at the young'uns.

RAZOR FREESTYLE SCOOTER

Publisher: Crave
Developer: Crawfish
Release Date: Q4



We can't imagine choosing this game over Tony Hawk's Pro Skater 2 — have we hit you over the head enough times about that one yet? However, if you simply can't get enough, the PlayStation version of this scooter-based variation on the theme wasn't bad, so this may be a competent diversion.

ROCKET POWER

Publisher: THQ
Developer: Dark Black
Release Date: Q4



Yet another children's game based on a cartoon license, this time from a Nickelodeon series. Gameplay is based upon the talents of a quartet of pre-teen extreme sports enthusiasts who traverse through the game's various stages on skateboards and occasionally pogo sticks.

PITFALL: THE MAYAN ADVENTURE

Publisher: Majesco Developer: PipeDream Interactive

The source version of this port is not Activision's seminal Pitfall!, released in '82 on Atari 2600, but rather the weaker, unfocused platformer that showed up on SNES in '94. The player takes the role of Pitfall Harry Jr., who must jump, swing, and bullwhip his way through the jungle to find his missing father. The sound effects are adequate, and the various animations for Harry and his enemies are actually quite nice, but the rest of the graphics and gameplay are largely uninspired, containing elements equal parts Rayman Advance and Castlevania: Circle of the Moon without being able to hold a candle to either. On top of all that, you can actually get slapped to death by a single two-foot-tall monkey, which quite simply just doesn't seem right.



NextGen ★★☆☆☆

Bottom Line: This isn't terrible, but there are plenty of better-playing alternatives.

RAYMAN ADVANCE

Publisher: Ubi Soft Developer: Digital Eclipse



Digital Eclipse has done Ubi Soft's limble platform hero incredible justice with this eye-searingly beautiful port of the PSX Rayman. Each level is lovingly rendered down to the smallest detail, even including superfluous elements like fluttering butterflies. This is complemented by some of the smoothest animations we've seen on a handheld. The familiar-yet-solid gameplay remains the same, with Rayman running, jumping, climbing, and punching his way through level after level of lush, colorful environments ranging from a jungle and a moonscape to a musically-themed wonderland. The sound and control are solid, and the game's peculiar personality remains intact.

NextGen ★★★★★

Bottom Line: Sure, Super Mario Bros. 2 is a classic, but this has to be seen and played to be believed.

READY 2 RUMBLE BOXING: ROUND 2

Publisher: Midway Developer: Crawfish Interactive

Midway's flagship boxer shows up on GBA looking as if it's already gone a few rounds. On paper, it would seem the game lost little in the transition: There are eight fighters (plus three hidden), and even the mini-games in the Career mode are here. When the bell rings, however, its legs get shaky. It starts with the graphics: The fighters are so small that when they're near one another, it's often difficult to make out just what your opponent is doing. Even worse, the perspective has been squeezed to 2D, which makes dodging to the sides a peculiar experience. But by far the biggest problem is the control, which appears sluggish and simply hasn't mapped well onto GBA. Thus, the fighting lacks the speed and fluidity so critical to previous versions of the game.



NextGen ★★☆☆☆

Bottom Line: This one's still in the ring, but it's out on its feet.

SUPER DODGE BALL ADVANCE

■ Publisher: **Atlus Games** ■ Developer: **Million**

Atlus has blessed GBA owners with this, an updated port of one of the SNES masterpieces, *Super Dodge Ball*. For those poor souls who never played the original version, the game's premise is lifted directly from the greatest Phys. Ed. activity ever: Two teams of super-deformed kids throw a single ball at one another. When a character has been pummeled too much, he's out. The team that runs out of guys first loses.

Strategy comes from ball movement, positioning and some 50 special throws, which explode, launch the target into the air, or multiply into additional projectiles. The computer is too easy to beat, but played against another human, this is some of the most fun you can have with your GBA.

NextGen ★★★★★

Bottom Line: A great game based on an overlooked classic. A bit thin for the solo player, though.



SUPER MARIO ADVANCE

■ Publisher: **Nintendo** ■ Developer: **Nintendo**



While every Nintendo system must launch with a Mario game, we have to question the reasoning behind this one. Quite simply, it's a remake of *Super Mario Bros. 2*, which is generally considered to be the weakest in the series. While the graphics have received a facelift (à la *Mario All-Stars*), the gameplay seems far more mediocre now than when it was on NES. Players must pick one of four Mario characters (Mario, Luigi, Peach, and Toad) and traverse across seven dream-like worlds. It's fairly easy, pretty short, and no more than a brief diversion compared to some of the other launch heavy-hitters. Even the inclusion of a two-player link-up of the original *Mario Bros.* can't save this one.

NextGen ★★★★★

Bottom Line: This classic probably shouldn't have been brought back. It's well translated but hasn't aged gracefully.

TONY HAWK'S PRO SKATER 2

■ Publisher: **Activision** ■ Developer: **Vicarious Visions**

This game represents the most amazing piece of technology we've ever seen on a handheld. Quite simply, this is an exact port of the PSX *Tony Hawk's Pro Skater 2* with all the moves, all the characters (they're even polygonal), all the animations, and all the skate parks intact. The only shift is in camera perspective, which is now isometric instead of over the shoulder. While it may take you a little time to adjust, once you do this becomes one of the most addictive and playable games ever made for a portable system. The only nitpick we have is that it's a little harder to get your bearings in the new perspective — but everything's so finely tuned and playable you'll hardly notice.

NextGen ★★★★★

Bottom Line: Buy this and you'll be a believer too. The Hawk has been done justice on a portable.



SHAUN PALMER'S PRO SNOWBOARDER

Publisher: **Activision**
Developer: **Natsume**
Release Date: **Fall**



Activision has revealed little about this upcoming snowboard title, but it looks to sport a predictably *Tony Hawk*-meets-*SSX* style of gameplay. Hey, if it ain't broke...

SONIC THE HEDGEHOG ADVANCE

Publisher: **Sega**
Developer: **Sega**
Release Date: **TBA**



Sega's fleet-footed blue mascot was simply perfect on Neo Geo Pocket, so we have little reason to doubt that his first appearance on a Nintendo console will be anything less. At press time, Sega had yet to announce whether this would be a port of the original game, an all-new title, or something in between.

SPIDER-MAN: MYSTERY'S MENACE

Publisher: **Activision**
Developer: **Vicarious Visions**
Release Date: **Fall**



A side-scroller featuring everyone's favorite web-slinger. While details about the plot are scarce, Activision promises most of Spidey's powers will make it into the game, including spider sense and of course, wall-climbing.

SPONGEBOB SQUAREPANTS

Publisher: **THQ**
Developer: **Climax**
Release Date: **Fall**

If you don't already know *SpongeBob SquarePants*, it's probably because you aren't between the ages of 2 and 11, but it's the number-two televised cartoon behind *Rugrats* in this demographic. As a result, we doubt this game, whatever its form, will appeal to anyone who understood our above use of the word "demographic."

SPORTS ILLUSTRATED FOR KIDS BASEBALL

Publisher: **Bam! Entertainment**
Developer: **Senari Interactive**
Release Date: **September**



If *High Heat* is too much of a baseball sim for you to handle, perhaps you'll want to step up to the plate with this title. The gameplay won't be realistic, but you'll get to make important decisions, like choosing your team colors and picking a mascot.

SPYRO: SEASON OF ICE (TENTATIVE TITLE)

Publisher: **Universal Interactive**
Developer: **Digital Eclipse**
Release Date: **November**



Universal's purple platformer will burn up GBA (the first non-Sony console *Spyro* will appear upon) this fall. The plot and levels are new, but gameplay will remain the same — like *Tony Hawk 2*, it's 3D with an isometric camera. With *Spyro* confirmed, is there any doubt that a *Crash Bandicoot* game is next?

STAR WARS: JEDI POWER BATTLES

Publisher: THQ
Developer: HotGen
Release Date: Q4



Although the PlayStation and Dreamcast versions of this title were seriously lacking, it's possible that a stripped-down version with an isometric camera could actually work in the handheld market. But we're not going to be the guinea pigs.

STREET FIGHTER ALPHA III

Publisher: Capcom
Developer: Capcom
Release Date: Fall/Winter



Fans of 2D fighters may never resolve the debate as to which Roman numeral in Capcom's flagship series is the best. However, Capcom plans to make both sides happy, releasing a GBA

version of not only the classic *Super Street Fighter II Turbo*, but this newer evolution as well.

STUART LITTLE

Publisher: Activision
Developer: TBA
Release Date: TBA

Activision hasn't released any information about this title other than to reveal that it's coming, and we should see it around the same time as the next *Stuart Little* movie. We think it will very likely skew young and feature a mouse.

SUPER STREET FIGHTER II

Publisher: Capcom
Developer: Capcom
Release Date: August



2D fighter fans are already going out of their minds over this title, a near-exact port of Capcom's timeless *Super Street Fighter II Turbo*, complete with two-player link support. If Capcom can figure out some intuitive button mapping, you're going to want this one.

TETRIS WORLDS

Publisher: THQ
Developer: Blue Planet
Release Date: Q4



For all the progress in games and game technology, we still find ourselves unable to willingly turn away from a game of Tetris. With over 50 million licensed copies sold worldwide — many of those packed in with the Game Boy — this game will appear on every system from now until the end of time. And we can't help but think it deserves to.

TOM AND JERRY: THE MAGIC RING

Publisher: NewKidCo International
Developer: Digital Eclipse
Release Date: October



A slapstick adventure based upon the classic cartoon duo's up-and-coming home video. You can play as either Jerry the mouse, who wants

to get a magic ring off his head easily and harmlessly, or his feline antagonist Tom, who would prefer to yank the ring off by force — especially if his little friend Jerry's head comes with it.

TONY HAWK'S PRO SKATER 3

Publisher: Activision
Developer: TBA
Release Date: TBA



Activision has only just announced a GBA version of the game — though there could be no doubt it was coming — and has yet to reveal when it will arrive, who will do the porting honors, and which of the game's planned features will make it into this version. However, after *Tony Hawk's Pro Skater 2*, we'd still wade through piranha-infested waters wearing hot-dog flavored pants to get our hands on a copy.

WINGS

Publisher: Ciemaware
Developer: Crawford Interactive
Release Date: October



This isometric WWI-era flight combat sim promises a staggering 230+ missions, ranging from bombing runs to dogfights with enemy aces. Plus, it'll offer two-player link-up support. If gameplay is even remotely solid, this sounds like plenty of bang for the buck.

X-MEN: REIGN OF APOCALYPSE

Publisher: Activision
Developer: Digital Eclipse
Release Date: Fall



This one- to four-player, side-scrolling brawler reminds us of Konami's 1992 arcade machine, into which we pumped many, many quarters. This new game will feature no fewer than 40 characters from the X-Men universe, though not all will be playable.

NextGen



TOP GEAR GT CHAMPIONSHIP

■ Publisher: Kemco ■ Developer: Kemco

The GBA is already demonstrating its prowess in the racing genre, and Kemco's entry is easily the most sim-like, visually arresting racer we've seen for GBA, and it offers an excellent sensation of speed. We find ourselves more drawn to the less simmy, more arcade-like action of THQ's *GT Advance* racer, but for the serious gearhead on the go, this might be the better choice, as it offers the deepest amount of car customization, as well as a track editor.

NextGen ★★☆☆☆

Bottom Line: Great paint job, but the engine's not running on all cylinders.

TWEETY AND THE MAGIC GEMS

■ Publisher: Kemco ■ Developer: Kemco

It was inevitable that someone would release a cart full of mini-games for GBA, and there are worse licenses with which to do it than Looney Tunes. And this game, with its four-player support and poorly animated, cartoonish graphics, will probably sell just fine. Perhaps some people really value the idea of a button-mashing party game — for a portable system (is that ironic to anyone else?). But we simply can't recommend this game. There are too many better titles on offer.



NextGen ★★☆☆☆

Bottom Line: A game for those who live and die by collections of simplistic party games. Everyone else should steer clear.

Sony, Microsoft, and Nintendo make it seem easy to jump on board the next-gen console train. It's not. If you're a game company and you don't have the right game on the right platform at the right time, you've lost millions. Eidos says it can make the jump — without the help of Lara Croft.

EIDOS ON THE EDGE

➔ Make no mistake about it — last year was rough for the videogame

industry. The PC game market continued to shrink, and every major publisher from Activision to Ubi Soft entered the uncharted waters of the next-generation consoles. Is it more important to be a PlayStation 2 launch title or to wait until there's a bigger installed base? Can we take a chance on an unproven PC game? Should Dreamcast resources be redirected toward GameCube? These are just a few of the questions being asked behind the corporate doors of publishers around the world, including Eidos Interactive.

"A lot of companies that are putting out sub-par software will regret it."

— Rob Dyer, president, Eidos Interactive

As the game industry's revenue dropped for the first time in five years, Eidos took its share of lumps. The company that found success during the salad days of PlayStation and PC wasn't immune to the overall hit, and *Daikatana* certainly didn't help by selling an underwhelming 43,000 copies despite its now-legendary delays and development costs. A new landscape has emerged along with the new consoles, and every third-party publisher is struggling to make sense of the evolving industry. The survivors of this transition period will be the companies that not only recognize the changes happening but adapt to these changes as well.

"[Publishers] are learning a hard lesson right now that consumers will be very choosy with what they buy," warns Eidos President Rob Dyer. "A lot of companies that are putting out sub-par software will regret it."

A recent look at EBWorld.com's top-selling PS2 list

illustrates this point: The second-best-selling game is a pre-order of Konami's *Metal Gear Solid 2* — which isn't slated to ship for another six months. PS2 promised a new age of gaming, but the software hasn't delivered on that promise. True, PS2 had the most successful launch in console history, but it might've been better had Sony held the hardware a little longer to make sure the right software was there.

"During the early days of PlayStation," says Dyer, "[former Sony boss] Bernie Stolar walked around saying, 'I won't let this on the system, I won't let that on the system,' and everyone was up in arms and couldn't believe [he was so uncompromising on quality]. But he did everyone a big favor. If you look at the top games that came out at the PlayStation launch, your jaw hit the floor when you saw *Toshinden*, *Tekken*, and *Ridge Racer*. Those were the games that made you step back and realize we entered the next generation. I think Sony should be 'Dr. No' internally and not let games get out that don't meet a minimum threshold of creativity or quality."

A Focused Plan

Publishers are taking steps to guard against disappointing sales, such as using focus testing to increase the quality of games. Alex Seropian, lead designer for Bungie, points to extensive focus group access as one of the

greatest benefits of his company's acquisition by Microsoft. It's a simple concept: Before you release a game, let some gamers play it to determine what's great and what needs improvement. Dyer remembers that during his days with Crystal Dynamics, the games that were thoroughly playtested were the most successful. "Have we [thoroughly playtested] our games across the board? No, and it's obvious," admits Dyer. "Focus testing is not cheap, and it takes a lot of time. The feedback may say you have to change an entire character or change the whole environment, and that doesn't happen overnight. That can take months. We haven't done it across the board, and we've taken our shots. We absolutely need to do more focus testing, and we are."

Risky Business

Despite the commercial success of titles like *Age of Empires II* and *Who Wants to Be a Millionaire?*, the PC game business is still an extremely dangerous market for publishers. According to NPD Group Senior Analyst Steve Koenig, the top five PC games accounted for a whopping 12% of the entire market's revenues, illustrating how that business has become extremely hit-driven, where only the top five or so titles make money. The top-selling PC game of 2000, EA's *The Sims*, sold about 1.8 million units. Compare that with the 170,000 units sold of *Deus Ex* and the 105,000 units of *Hitman* sold — and those are the most successful Eidos PC games released last year.

■ Eidos poster girl Lara Croft may be a big-screen fixture this summer, but the vampire Kain is the company's leading man in its fall game lineup





The revenue upside of consoles versus PC games has become such that Eidos is allocating 75% of its resources to console

development, with only 25% budgeted for PC game development. Blizzard made a killing with *Diablo II* last year, selling



■ Eidos didn't sell as many units of *TimeSplitters* as it hoped, but the company thinks a larger installed base will boost the potential of *TimeSplitters 2*

over a million units around the world without paying a royalty fee to a console manufacturer. But for every *Diablo II*, there are a hundred PC games that simply don't sell and create a loss for their publishers.

Piracy also plays a huge part in the declining PC game market. According to the IDSA, piracy accounted for an incredible \$3 billion dollars in lost game revenue last year, largely owing to affordable CD burners, giving

WARREN SPECTOR, GAME DESIGNER, ION STORM

Ask anyone at Eidos to tell you the best thing they got out of the 1999 Ion Storm acquisition, and they'll say it was Warren Spector. *Ultima Underworld*, *System Shock*, *Deus Ex* — Spector's golden touch comes from years of studied approach to cutting-edge game design.

Next Gen: Has it been difficult to switch gears and work on console games?

WS: Although we're very sensitive to the differences between a PC and a console, I think there's an opportunity to bring a new gameplay approach to console players. We want to introduce them to the richer worlds and greater player choices that are the hallmarks of the games we make here, to translate that onto the console without losing sight of the differences in the controls, interface, accessible gameplay. I'm not interested in making console games, I'm interested in making games that rock on consoles, if you see what I mean.

NG: So you wouldn't say that PC games are inherently more sophisticated?

WS: That's what we're going to change. It doesn't have anything to do with the platform. [Switching to console-game development] isn't so much a problem as an opportunity — there's no reason why 10 times the number of people who played *Deus Ex* or *System Shock* wouldn't love that kind of game, but they're put off by "Huh! I have to push the W-key to move forward!" Give them a controller with an analog joystick and 10 buttons, and they'll start playing. So if we can find a way to get the density of interaction with the simplicity of the controller interface, holy cow, we could rule the world.



■ Spector credits Project Directors Randy and Harvey Smith, along with the rest of his team, for fueling Ion Storm into the next decade

NG: Can you make games that are sophisticated yet easily accessible?

WS: A lot of people say, "Ooh, *Deus Ex*, that's a hardcore-gamer game," but I think a game that allows you to choose shooting, talking, or sneaking your way past a problem makes it more accessible. If you're not "smart" enough to figure out what the goofy designer had in mind, you can try something else, and odds are it's going to work. Letting players figure things out and express themselves through gameplay — I don't see how that's limiting in any way.

NG: How has the industry evolved over the years?

WS: The teams are so much bigger now. It used to be that if you had a 10-person team, that was a big team. Now they're around 20 to 30 people. The question now that we're moving to consoles is, "How do we compete with Square or Konami and the folks who put 100 people on a game?" If your game doesn't look good enough, people won't care how good it plays. When you're competing with a *MGS2* — yow, that's pretty stiff competition. They keep raising the graphical bar, when we want to raise the gameplay bar.

Ultimately, bigger teams [are] inevitable, but we're not doing that now. I have faith in gamers that as long as we're above that graphical quality line, they'll find us. *Deus Ex* wasn't the best-looking game last year, but it looked good enough. People liked the story, or gameplay, or concept, and they lived with the fact it wasn't the prettiest game out there. With *Deus Ex 2* and *Thief 3*, we're looking for ways to increase the graphical quality — both of those games will look significantly better than *Deus Ex* — but I'm not interested in competing with a 50-person art team.

NG: So how can you improve *Deus Ex*, which many considered one of the best games in 2000?

WS: Our goal on *Deus Ex* was that any object on screen could be used the way you would in the real world. Guess what? We failed. It wasn't possible, and it's still not possible, but we're getting closer, and the power of the technology is largely responsible for that. There were events in the original concept for *Deus Ex*, like rioting in the streets of the cities, that was tough to show when you can't have more than three people onscreen at once. So now that we can put more people out there, that scenario becomes more realistic.

NG: From where will the "Next Big Thing" in gaming come?

WS: I'm a heretic for saying this stuff, but the great advances in gaming are going to come from design,



■ Warren Spector would rather quit and pursue his music career than make *Thief Kart Racing*

not technology. You'd be hard pressed to say that the best game last year was better or more fun than *M.U.L.E.* For gaming to advance as a form of expression, people have to stop thinking, "Oh, look, now that thing I can shoot looks human instead of 20 polygons stuck together!" We have to be more creative and think about how the player is going to interact with this world. Taking the designer off the stage and putting the player on it is the fundamental characteristic of gaming that separates it from all other media. It's all about the player. That's what Will Wright gets better than anyone in the world. There are too many designers that think "How can I put prettier pictures up there?" or "How can I create a puzzle that no one is going to solve?" C'mon, go back and play an Infocom game!

NG: What's next?

WS: When I'm completely confident that *Deus Ex 2* and *Thief 3* are rocking, at that point there's a fantasy game I want to make. It's way too early to talk about, but I'm ready to get back into a more fantastic world. I want to do a fantasy game that doesn't embarrass adults. I want to prove that you can take orcs, elves, dragons, and the whole deal and create a world that's so deep and interactive, where people have real concerns and real lives, that adults wouldn't be embarrassed to play it.

NG: So despite the trend toward casual gaming, we can expect you to continue to push the envelope?

WS: I'll put my teams against anyone else in the world. When risks increase, that's when you have to start taking some chances. If you want that number-one hit, you've got to go for it.

publishers a real incentive to turn from PC game development to console games. PS2 and Xbox use DVDs, and GameCube will use a proprietary disc, making them much harder to copy.

During a panel discussion at this year's Game Developers Conference, Ensemble Studios Senior Game Designer Bruce Shelley raised the point that game innovation has always led on PC, not consoles. Look at *EverQuest* or *Half-Life*, and it's hard to argue. But there may come a time in the very near future when publishers won't fund innovation because of the financial risks involved in trying to sell something new. "Piracy is a much bigger problem than anyone thinks, and it wipes out a huge chunk of revenue," says Dyer, "and most consumers could care less. They don't realize that if we lose too much money to piracy, we won't make

a PC game the next time — we'll make a console game. PC game publishing is an ugly business. We'll never move everything to consoles, but I don't see Eidos spending a lot of money on original PC games in the future."

Give and Take

The dearth of PS2 consoles at launch still haunts Sony, but the biggest ghosts are those of software sales killed during the last holiday season. Eidos is just one of many third-party publishers that had game orders cut back by retailers who knew that only those lucky enough to get their hands on a PS2 would be buying. Dyer claims that Eidos could have diverted more resources to the upcoming *Project Eden*, *Commandos 2*, and *Soul Reaver* for an earlier release, but chose to wait until a larger installed base was established. Instead, Eidos had one

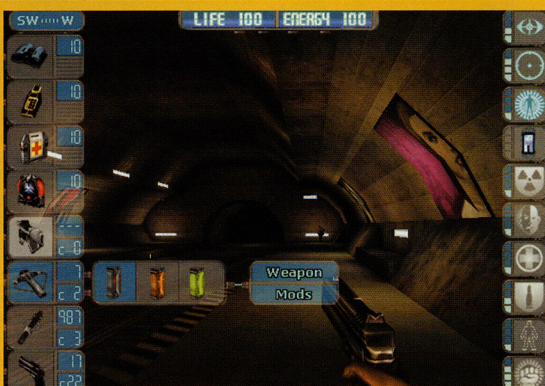
game at launch, *TimeSplitters*, to establish itself on PS2 (perhaps a contractual obligation to Sony), and several titles coming later this year that are poised to sell more than they would have sold last October.

Like many publishers, the Eidos strategy for last year was

not to focus much attention on PS2 and its small initial installed base. Instead, Eidos planned to take advantage of the 26-million-plus PlayStation units out there. Plans for a PS2 *Tomb Raider* launch title were suspended in lieu of *Tomb Raider Chronicles* for PlayStation, which the NPD



■ Eidos President Rob Dyer says most people would love to have his *Tomb Raider* franchise's over-exposure "problem," which has resulted in more than 17 million units sold



■ Ion Storm is bringing *Deus Ex* to PS2, making one of the great PC titles of 2000 available to console gamers

→ Special

Eidos on the Edge

Group reports sold about 135,000 units — a disappointment compared to sales of previous *Tomb Raider* generations on PlayStation. “We wouldn’t have had to miss a cycle of *Tomb Raider* on PlayStation [to make a PS2 version near launch],” explains Dyer, “and so we made sure we had our major franchise on PlayStation to take advantage of its installed base. But there

wasn’t a lot of [new PSOne] hardware in the marketplace, and there wasn’t a lot of support [from Sony] for PlayStation. From my conversations with Sony, I know there were discussions on whether to make PlayStations or PS2s, and it’s hard to do both.”

Publishers across the board found lukewarm sales of its PlayStation software, largely attributed to the lack of



■ The advanced technology in the new consoles is helping to bring Disney-esque graphics to games, such as with Core’s *Herdy Gerdy*

hardware to push software sales. Twenty-six million PlayStations sound formidable, but console owners usually buy only one game at a time. It’s when a console is sold that software really moves, usually four or five games in one transaction. The results of such recent poor PlayStation game sales have scared many major publishers completely off that platform and onto the potential of new consoles.

Calculated Gambles

The challenges with PlayStation and PS2 games may be the reason that publishers are taking a cautious approach to Xbox and GameCube. Although a few companies are publishing exclusive games on Xbox, such as Tecmo’s *Dead or Alive 3*, most companies are limiting their Xbox and

GameCube projects to one or two titles. It’s difficult to imagine Sony, Microsoft, or Nintendo failing, but no publisher wants to risk a huge investment in case the improbable happens and Xbox or GameCube have an awful launch. Similarly, Microsoft and Nintendo seem to be taking very cautious approaches with so much at stake.

According to Dyer, Microsoft is being very calculated in its third-party approval process. Publishers cannot simply waltz in with a racing title if Microsoft feels it has enough racing games for the platform. The fact that Xbox has an easier architecture than that of PS2 isn’t an open invitation to developers; game companies need to come to Microsoft with an explanation of what makes a potential game different than something already given the green light. And for all the talk of how easy it is to make an Xbox game, it’s just as expensive to



■ *Project Eden*, a squad-based action game, should be met with a larger PS2 installed base when it’s released later this year

ADRIAN SMITH, OPERATIONS DIRECTOR, CORE

Even though *Tomb Raider* was MIA at this year’s E3, Core [Eidos’ star studio] isn’t taking the year off. Core Operations Director Adrian Smith and the rest of the Core team are tackling the challenges of the new systems, and they’re putting the finishing touches on *Herdy Gerdy* and making sure *Tomb Raider: Next Generation* will be worth the wait.

Next Gen: How complex was the move to the new systems?

AS: We’ve had a huge overhaul. Next-gen titles require a whole new approach to the philosophy behind their development. We’ve had to expand and change the structure of our teams. People have had to take greater responsibility for the different disciplines involved so that we can produce coherent levels of realism across all areas of development.

NG: How does the new technology affect how game ideas are brought to life?

AS: [Consoles] are becoming increasingly capable of reproducing what our developers originally envision. By their very nature, game ideas are massive, so it’s fantastic for our teams to have technology that allows their ideas to be realized more faithfully.

We no longer have to fight so many technical constraints so we can be much more creative and freeform in our approach, but this means that all elements of any title have to be improved significantly. And the online potential opens up a whole new avenue to consumers — we can give our games greater longevity, more character and plot progression, and [we can] ultimately deliver a unique game for every consumer.

NG: But is there a danger in fixating on the technology?

AS: It’s important to remember that a more powerful machine doesn’t automatically produce better games. The

new hardware will enable us to add visual depth, give our games more style and also give the player a deeper experience, but at the end of the day those things alone don’t guarantee a more successful game than, say, *Space Invaders*!

NG: Has your approach to development changed along with the evolution of technology?

AS: Our main values have remained the same — solid gameplay first and foremost. We need to remember that games should be immediately enjoyable; whether the technology is old or new, these values will remain constant for us. We’re also catering to two different types of players: the diehard fans that immediately buy new hardware and launch titles, and the more mainstream consumer who may not purchase hardware until months after its launch. What the consumer actually wants can change over the lifespan of a title, so a year or so after launch we can take greater risks in genres and style.

NG: What do you think today’s gamers want, and how will you meet those needs?

AS: I think they want more satisfaction, faster gratification, and great looks from their games. They basically want to get more pleasure out of the whole gaming experience — something not only to impress themselves, but also their peers. We hope to achieve the above by ensuring that games are relatively easy to get into, that gamers are justly rewarded, and that they’re given these rewards frequently enough. Visually, we’re going into as much detail as possible within the parameters of each title’s overall graphical style.

NG: What should gamers expect with the first *Tomb Raider* on PS2?

AS: The overall style and ‘feel’ to the title will be deeper and darker... but that’s all we want to say right now.

■ Next-generation console games such as *Thunderstrike III* on PS2 deliver great visuals, but the focus must always be on the gameplay itself



"Piracy is a much bigger problem than anyone thinks, and it wipes out a huge chunk of revenue, and most consumers could care less. They don't realize that if we lose too much money to piracy, we won't make a PC game the next time — we'll make a console game."

— Rob Dyer, president, Eidos



■ Every platform needs a family-friendly game with mascot potential, and Microsoft paid \$2.7 million to get theirs with *Mad Dash*

make: Dyer estimates it takes anywhere between \$3 million and \$5 million on the cheap side.

The fact that Dyer doesn't even know the make-up of Nintendo's GameCube business model, let alone have any GameCube projects under development, doesn't bode well.

Nintendo established the royalty model in the game industry, where game publishers paid Nintendo for the right to make and publish a NES title, but a decreasing number of third-party publishers have made money within that structure. The added cost of N64's cartridge format, on



top of royalty payments, was so expensive that Nintendo lost a lot of third-party support. On the other hand, the success of Nintendo first-party games like *The Legend of Zelda: Majora's Mask*, *Pokémon Snap*, and *Paper Mario* suggests the company is content to have the majority of

its revenue come from first-party game revenue.

The Online Question

While many developers are concerned about losing marketshare to new third-party publisher Sega, Eidos doesn't see the company as a threat to its core business of character-based action games. And Eidos doesn't even see Internet-capable console games, Sega's forte, as viable enough to put large amounts of resources behind it. Instead of online multi-play, Eidos thinks the opportunity of the Internet will manifest itself in the delivery of content and the infrastructure that will bring.

"Episodic gaming is the way of the future," predicts Dyer. "Players will be able to get a con-

GLEN SCHOFIELD, DIRECTOR, CRYSTAL DYNAMICS

Developer Crystal Dynamics was purchased by Eidos in 1998 and has made games for everything from the cartoonish *Gex* on Saturn to the upcoming gothic PS2 title *Soul Reaver 2*. Although Sony will have the established installed base and a couple of *Kain* games this year, don't be surprised if Crystal Dynamics Director Glen Schofield begins to gravitate toward developer-friendly Xbox.

NG: How did Crystal come up with a light-hearted game like *Mad Dash* when you're best known for the dark look of the *Kain* games?

GS: The *Mad Dash* team worked on *Gex 2* and *3*, as well as *Disney World Magical Racing Tour*, so they have this legacy of cartoony characters. About two years ago, Eidos came to me and said, "Gex wasn't as popular as we thought it would be, so what we need to do is put Gex to rest for a while. But we still want a couple of cartoon characters, so we can say we're not just this company that comes out with violent games." So we came up with [*Mad Dash*, which is] a hybrid of *Gex* and a racing game, and every time we showed the idea to our internal groups, they loved it. In all my years, it was the easiest sell.

NG: Was it an easy sell to Microsoft, too?

GS: Microsoft asked Eidos if they had anything they'd like to put on Xbox, and myself and Noah [Hughes, lead designer on *Mad Dash*] went up and gave our song and dance, and they loved the game. They said this could be [Xbox's] party game, and they threw \$2.7 million at us and said they wanted *Mad Dash* exclusive to Xbox.

NG: Developers have often said it's easy to work within the Xbox architecture, but how's it been working with Microsoft as a company?

GS: I don't know why Microsoft is being so phenomenal in working with us, but they want to help us in any way they can. We're on their technical web site daily, and they'll answer our questions within the hour. There were times in working with Sony when we've had questions and we would never, ever get them answered. We just learned that you don't get questions answered by Sony, and that we're on our own in making a PS2 game.

I do have to say Sony puts its money where its mouth

is once they see a game they like. With *Soul Reaver*, they put a lot of money up front with both games. Once they've seen what they like, they've been there for support. But while you're making the game, there's not a lot of support. I can't say enough about how good [Microsoft's] been.

NG: What's an example of the way that the Xbox team has helped?

GS: They're willing to look at our code and give us feedback, but we're reluctant to do that with anyone. When they were here the other day and looking at what we're doing with some of our sprites, they said they could make it look 10 times better. They got on the phone, and a guy immediately emailed down what a sprite would look like [with their technique], and it looked great. They sent us the code. It wasn't quite as easy as cut-and-pasting the code in, but now we know how to do it. Sony has their documents and stuff, but they have a different way to do things. When we got our original docs, it was all in Japanese.

Xbox is one sweet machine. We're developing on PC, but when we put it on Xbox, it looks better. I've never seen that before. On PS2, things look good, but they don't look better. We had *Blood Omen* running just fairly well on PS2, and Microsoft was interested in seeing it. In two days we had it up and running on Xbox. It's amazing.

On PS2, *Blood Omen* was running fairly slow, and on Xbox it was running at 70fps. Some of the guys working on PS2 games asked if they can have Xbox [dev kits] to develop with, because they're more powerful than any of the PCs we can get.

NG: What's next for Crystal?

GS: We're working on a brand-new sci-fi game being created by Toys for Bob, Paul Richie's [internal Crystal division]. He wants to go back to one of these original shooters, where the screen is loaded with things to kill. It's sort of like *Starship Troopers*, where you're surrounded by millions of enemies and you have to shoot your way out.

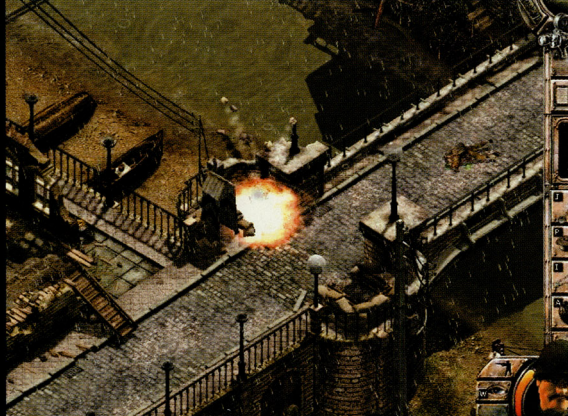
I don't know what platform Toys for Bob is going to develop its game on, but they'll probably go with PS2. [PS2] should have the largest installed base when that game's released at Christmas 2002. We're willing to make some commitment to Xbox, but at some point we have to wait and see how the numbers play out.



■ The *Blood Omen* franchise has the potential for a continuing storyline, which Eidos hopes can be the key to episodic gaming

"I know what kind of business model [GBA has], and you can't make money there. It's a great model for Nintendo, not so great for everyone else."

— Rob Dyer



■ To reach the widest market, most publishers are releasing games across multiple platforms, such as *Commandos 2* on PS2, Dreamcast, and PC

of old games such as *Knockout Kings* and NASCAR racing. Full versions of games face the problem of size; downloading *Final Fantasy XI*, even with a broadband modem, would probably take over an hour — an eternity in Internet time. Episodic gaming is also limited to specific genres such as adventure or RPG, which are tailor-made for a continuing storyline.

Where to Next?

Despite all the attention being given to Game Boy Advance, Eidos doesn't see that platform as viable to its business. The potential of GBA is largely predicated on the recent success of Game Boy Color, but the massive sales numbers on GBC are misleading. Last E3, Nintendo Executive VP of Marketing Peter Main raved about how GBC was where people made the most money, but the truth is that few companies outside Nintendo enjoyed GBC's popularity. Nintendo's first-party software, particularly its Pokémon titles, sold in unbelievable volumes, but third-party revenue

was limited. It's tough to make an upfront investment in a cartridge (somewhere between \$12 and \$18), add marketing and everything else, and turn a profit. "I know what kind of business model [GBA has], and you can't make money there," explains Dyer. "It's a great model for Nintendo, not so great for everyone else."

The portable platform in which Dyer does see potential is the cell phone market. It has an insanely large installed base, close to one unit per person in the United States, and the technology advances in leaps and bounds each year. The category has already sprouted some intriguing offerings, such as Jamdat's RPG, *Gladiator*, where players fight as stick figures against other cell phone owners. It doesn't exactly sound like *Tribes 2*, but it could be a quick fix when you're away from your living room. Dyer expects cell phone games to be a huge part of Eidos' business in five years, but with the online delivery of content, the challenge will be how companies like his will get paid.

Whether Eidos has played its cards right during this transition won't be known until after this fiscal year, but Dyer is looking forward to a year in the black. Like many companies, Eidos has learned the new technologies and spent the money to establish brands. Now Eidos is on the verge of weathering the last of the transition storm. "We've already done the investing [in R&D and marketing]. That's why we had such a lousy year in 2000," says Dyer. "We're ready to bear fruit now."

— Kevin Toyama

tinuous cycle of gaming, whether ordering the latest installment of a game for \$9.99 or buying a subscription. I think that's what the revenue model will be when Microsoft and Sony's game channels are up and running."

Publishers are drooling over the potential of direct game distribution to consumers. The continuing dot-com meltdown has proven that traditional retail outlets aren't going away anytime soon, but the convenience of content delivered straight to your console hard drive tantalizes game companies with the poten-

tial for additional sales. "I want to produce the next West Game on the console, meaning every third Wednesday night players know they can see what happens in that next story," says Dyer. "That's what's going to take [consoles] to the next level."

New broadband streaming companies are a viable concept, but downloading content directly onto a console's hard drive remains unproven. EA has broken the ice among major publishers by delivering games directly to PCs, but their offerings thus far consist of stripped-down versions

gameplay boundaries are slowly disappearing. A significant difference is the attitude of the player. Console gamers want an immediate experience, while PC players are looking for a deeper experience which requires more "mental work."

NG: With so much money at stake with games, from where will innovation come?

IP: I think medium-sized studios such as ourselves, Blizzard, and Valve are the present and future for innovation. [Medium-sized studios] have enough resources to develop expensive games and enough freedom to take risks.

NG: How important is the online component of a videogame?

IP: We're not making our games with much thought on this feature. I think that it will still take some time until [online gaming] is really developed and there is interest in it. The bigger risk will be in creating gaming experiences deep and interesting enough as to keep people playing online a long period of time.

IGNACIO PÉREZ, CEO, PYRO STUDIOS

Pyro Studios established a name for itself upon the release of *Commandos* and its mission pack, *Commandos: Beyond the Call of Duty*, which led to its acquisition by Eidos in 1999. CEO Ignacio Pérez is building off his company's first franchise with *Commandos 2* for PC, PS2, and Dreamcast, as well as the forthcoming PC titles *Praetorians* and *Heart of Stone*.

Next Gen: What are you looking to accomplish with *Commandos 2*?

IP: The priority was making a game that was different from any other existing games in the market. We wanted to make something new and not just clone an existing game. *Commandos 2* is going to be a completely new game.

NG: How different is PC development from console game development?

IP: I think that both are equally challenging except that they require a completely different approach. I think that the

→ Finals

One of the most anticipated PS2 games is here, and it rocks... And we can say the same for PC — cool

PlayStation 2

Gran Turismo 3	78
High Heat Baseball 2002	80
Army Men Sarge's Heroes 2	80
Cool Boarders 2001	80
MDK2: Armageddon	81
ESPN National Hockey Night	81
Gauntlet: Dark Legacy	81
Red Faction	82
Heroes of Might and Magic	82
Triple Play Baseball	82
Escape from Monkey Island	83
ESPN MLS Extra Time	83
Star Wars Super Bombad Racing	83



■ The class system still rules in GT3, racing like car against like car — as this showdown of compacts demonstrates



■ The much vaunted rain effects appear on a couple of unlockable tracks but are so finished and polished it's surprising they're not available from the outset

PLAYSTATION 2

Gran Turismo 3

■ Publisher: SCEA ■ Developer: Polyphony Digital

Driving for perfection



■ Rally mode features perfect audio

▶ If *Gran Turismo 3* does anything truly and dramatically new, it's to provide a real sense of place. Make no mistake: This is a souped-up remix of the original game in terms of structure and content, but the new graphics engine makes it so much more than the sum of its

parts. That's why this deserves the nomenclature "3," since this was originally intended to be *Gran Turismo 2 A-Spec* — a half step to a true PS2 sequel.

The Rally mode alone is worthy of the entry fee to Polyphony's ambitious ride. Feedback through the analog control and the Dual Shock's solenoid coils isn't just visceral,

it's essential. Speeding through an opponent's dust cloud is just as dangerous as it sounds. The vastly improved car physics mean that when your four-wheel-drive Subaru hits a rut, it loses traction on the wheels that leave the ground, and you as the driver have to compensate quickly and smartly. Seldom has input from a controller been so



Dreamcast

Illbleed	84
18 Wheeler: American Pro Truck	84
Confidential Mission	84
Spider-Man	85



PlayStation

Time Crisis: Project Titan	86
Mat Hoffman's Pro BMX	86
The Simpsons Wrestling	86

PC

Tribes 2	87
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Fallout Tactics: Brotherhood of Steel	88
Evil Islands: Curse of the Lost Soul	88
Fate of the Dragon	88
Myst III: Exile	89
Kohan: Immortal Sovereigns	89
X-COM Enforcer	89

The Rating System

Since we're living in a time when even average games are pretty good, we at **Next Generation** will continue to demand even better. Note that a three-star rating is a typical "good" game, so expect to see a lot of them.

★★★★★	REVOLUTIONARY
★★★★	EXCELLENT
★★★☆☆	GOOD
★★☆☆☆	FAIR
★☆☆☆☆	BAD

● Denotes a review of a Japanese product



■ iLink is cool, but not essential for a multiplayer experience. The split-screen mode is a technical triumph

vital, and so analogous to a real-life experience. Add the optional GT3 force-feedback steering wheel to the mix, and you're faced with the inevitable conclusion that the controls here are perfect. They are.

A somewhat reduced list of available cars will be disappointing to the car collectors out there, but for most players the selection of 150+ vehicles is an embarrassment of riches. Tons of

world-class Japanese and European cars fill the ranks, and if the modest number of American cars is a little disappointing, familiar journeymen like the Dodge Viper and Chrysler PT Cruiser both provide very American, and very different, driving experiences. There's plenty of repetition, such as nine different versions of the Mitsubishi Lancer, but this is understandable given the detail lavished on each car, in terms of both aesthetics and physics.

That said, reviewing *Gran Turismo 3* comes down to searching for flaws, and there really aren't any. The frustration of racing lap after lap to improve your starting grid position is alleviated by the simple and generous Arcade mode. Handling in this mode is more forgiving, and frankly more "realistic" than in *Gran Turismo* mode. The testy twitching may simulate accurate



■ Too much of a good thing? No — the glaring sunshine actually affects gameplay

physics, but it doesn't give (and never has given) you all the input of real driving. Ironically, the Arcade mode makes up for lack of input by simply making things as easy and intuitive as they would be in real life.

But racing Arcade mode all day, while fun and involving, won't open up this game's treasures: its hidden cars (including a suite of Formula One vehicles), its unlockable tracks, and the sense of achievement that winning a seemingly impossible race brings. At its heart this is a simulation, and the *Gran Turismo* mode is eventually the most rewarding for the single player. The new weather effects — rain-slicked nighttime streets — seem pasted in at first but in reality add challenge and variety to the

otherwise very linear progression. Special attention has been lavished on sound, from convincing wind and road noise effects (that change appropriately depending on the selection of in-car or third-person view) to the furiously realistic howl of a turbo-charged Porsche.

In short, *Gran Turismo 3* provides a stunning graphical experience, a wealth of technical simulation, and even the simple, vital fun of multiplayer racing. All this in a game that spans racing genres, redefines technical excellence, and finally shows off PS2 to full effect. It's almost fortunate that this didn't ship with the launch of the system. The initial shortages were bad enough; this might have created a national disaster.

— Frank O'Connor

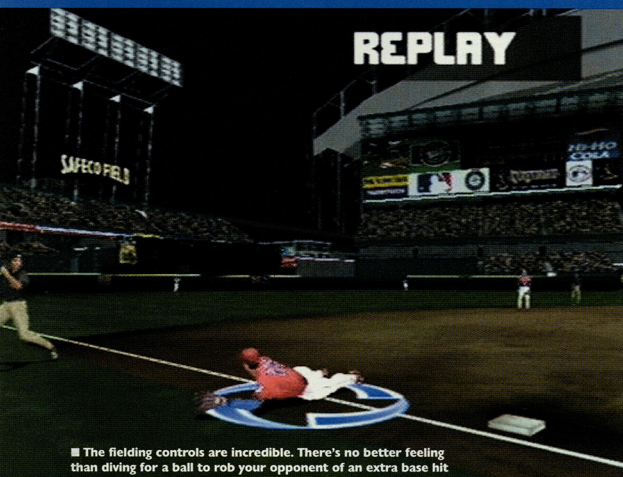
ILINK SECRETS

It's no secret that the multiplayer game of *GT3* is available as an iLink mode. Buy a cable, hook up as many as six PS2s, and play against opponents using up to six TVs. (Three sets can be accommodated for six players using split-screen mode.) What you might not have known is that you can effectively multitask iLinked PS2s to create a video wall of *GT3* goodness. Let the timer for multiplayer entry run out, and the game automatically defaults to the tiling mode, placing multiple aspects on multiple monitors. (Each PS2 outputs a synchronized fraction of the screen.) Hardly the most practical freebie in the world, but a very impressive demo of PS2 technology in action.



NextGen ★★★★★

Bottom Line: The best, most complete, and most impressive driving game so far, lapping its predecessors handily — and the first must-have for PlayStation 2.



■ The fielding controls are incredible. There's no better feeling than diving for a ball to rob your opponent of an extra base hit

■ PLAYSTATION 2

High Heat Major League Baseball 2002

■ Publisher: 3DO ■ Developer: 3DO

A winner on the field

➔ There was a time when console baseball games were among the standouts in the sports genre — open your history books to the original NES *Baseball Stars*, the early versions of the *RBI Baseball* series, and the Genesis and Saturn versions of *World Series Baseball*. Lately though, we've been given a

steady dose of good-looking games that resemble baseball on the surface, but forget to include many of the important things that make the sport so great.

Well, the PS2 version of *High Heat 2002* is here, and it reminds us of why we used to love those older games. No, it's not the best-looking game ever made. In fact, as PS2 efforts go, it's the game equivalent of the bespectacled, shy girl whose other qualities ultimately win the hero's affections. In other words, don't judge this game by its graphics alone.

The reason *High Heat 2002* has stolen our hearts is the masterful pitcher-batter interface, the sharp artificial intelligence (both on the base paths and in the dugout), and the intuitive and smooth fielding controls. Yes, it has a lot of the bells and whistles of the competing games, but it uses them to enhance the gameplay — not as a substitute for it.

In fact, the only thing keeping *High Heat 2002* from an unqualified recommendation is the lack of many of the options found in the award-winning PC version, most notably the outstanding Career mode and the user-adjustable tuning fix. — Rob Smolka

NextGen ★★★★★

Bottom Line: This is a must-buy for all serious PS2 baseball fans.

Army Men Sarge's Heroes 2

■ Platform: PlayStation 2 ■ Publisher: 3DO ■ Developer: 3DO

Sarge's gang has now made its appearance on PS2, but aside from the requisite graphical improvements, this debut is just as bland as their performance elsewhere.

This 3D action-adventure game follows closely behind the shoulders of Sarge, Vikki, and the rest as they attempt to recover critical war secrets from nefarious femme fatale Brigitte Bleu. This amounts to storming a number of novelty-sized, real-world environments, acquiring weapons of mass destruction, and wiping out the Tan army in various ways.

As with most games in this series, there are problems with the control. It's textbook bad: jerky, twitchy, and otherwise unresponsive. Shooting's a drag, and so is selecting a weapon. Simply moving the men around and completing minor tasks can be frustrating, and



■ Unfortunately, the move to PS2 doesn't seem to have done Sarge and the gang much good

the multiplayer modes are equally non-compelling. The in-game visuals aren't very consistent, either. There are some nice lighting and skin effects — the soldiers look like real plastic — but the framerate is choppy and the explosions are dull.

The high points are superficial: There's plenty of funny, tongue-in-cheek *Toy Soldier* humor, and the CG work is pretty good. Still, the time spent on the trappings would have been better spent fixing the actual gameplay. — David Chen

NextGen ★☆☆☆☆

Bottom Line: Not much better than the original PlayStation version, which isn't saying much.

Cool Boarders 2001

■ Platform: PlayStation 2 ■ Publisher: 989 Sports

■ Developer: Idol Minds

The *Cool Boarders* series has never been known for its originality — or, for that matter, for being especially good — and *Cool Boarders 2001* doesn't really break the mold. This doesn't look notably bad, but neither is it a huge graphic leap. As long as you keep moving you're not likely to notice the seams, but if you have to slow down for any reason the blocky textures and modest polygon count become glaringly obvious.

The trick system is workable, although somewhat cumbersome and mildly counterintuitive. For example, to pull off a special move you enter a string of button presses before executing the jump, not while in mid-air, making you a spectator, not a participant. Plus, this leaves you no way to abort the attempt mid-jump, or add more tricks to the end if you catch some especially big air. The environments



■ Not every game can be SSX, and as hard as Cool Boarders tries, it never even comes close

also have a bad habit of grabbing a hold of you and not letting you go — bang into a pylon the wrong way, and you'll spend the next 30 seconds rocking back and forth and jumping in place trying to get moving.

And again, *Cool Boarders* tries only to follow where others have gone before. With its new raising ramps, moving bumpers, and rolling "dodgeballs," it's pretty clear the idea was to ape *SSX* as closely as possible. — Jeff Lundrigan

NextGen ★★☆☆☆

Bottom Line: It's not the worst snowboarding game you've ever played, but there are far better ones out there.



■ If you think the umpire is out of his mind, you can use the instant replay

ESPN National Hockey Night

■ Platform: **PlayStation 2** ■ Publisher: **Konami** ■ Developer: **Konami**

Great hockey videogames are like great hockey players. Both must provide fast play and big thrills (brutal checks, gritty fights, and stunning shots) to keep the fans happy. Unfortunately, *National Hockey Night* is not a great hockey game, and flubs it on all counts.

Frustratingly slow play is the first and most obvious problem. The framerate is fine, but the soggy control makes this game feel like Beer League soccer rather than the fastest game on ice. Players often skate frozen in place during quick direction changes, enabling an opponent to steal a puck that was only inches away.

At times, this is simply frustrating. For instance, when you push the "shoot" button, the player doesn't shoot or even draw his stick back. Instead, he just freezes and slides across the ice until the



■ If you already own a copy of EA Sports' *NHL*, there's no reason to pick up *National Hockey Night*

button is released. Body checking is so haphazard even the dihard hockey goons in the office gave up trying. In the extras department, Konami hasn't included any options we haven't seen in every hockey game since Sega Genesis.

National Hockey Night isn't irredeemable; it's certainly better than *Face Off*, but it's just nowhere near as good as EA Sports' *NHL Hockey* either. — Dan Egger

NextGen ★★★★★

Bottom Line: Fans should stick to EA Sports' PS2 hockey game, which simply offers a more complete and more enjoyable overall experience.

Gauntlet: Dark Legacy

■ Platform: **PlayStation 2** ■ Publisher: **Midway** ■ Developer: **Midway**

Gauntlet was a great game, and there's some debate about *Gauntlet II*. But almost everything since then has pretty much been crap, at least on consoles. *Gauntlet Legends* was a pretty fun quarter-eater in the arcades, but the PSX version was plagued by terrible framerate and slowdown.

Dark Legacy restores *Gauntlet*'s good name with Sony. It has none of the slowdown or framerate problems of its predecessor and manages to maintain the feel of the original classic title, while still taking advantage of its 3D engine. In short, it's actually fun.

Up to four people can control any of the 28 playable characters (four standard, 24 unlockable) and explore 11 different worlds. The game saves character progress for each player, and there's a bit of "RPG-lite" level progression along



■ Every moment is pure chaos. You're lucky to just keep track of where your hero is

the way, as well as the ability to buy essentials between levels.

The controls are intuitive and flexible, and really that's what makes this so much fun. There are now two different types of basic attacks as well as combo attacks, two-player attacks, and the ability to charge, strafe, and block. It's still a silly button-masher, but there are now tons more cool buttons to mash and no slowdown to get in the way. — Daniel Erickson

NextGen ★★★★★

Bottom Line: It's not brain surgery, but it's good multiplayer fun, and that's rare enough these days.

■ PLAYSTATION 2

PLAYSTATION 2 **Finals**

MDK2: Armageddon

■ Publisher: **Interplay** ■ Developer: **Bioware**

No giant meteors — just Max, Doc, and Kurt



■ Float from platform to platform by using Kurt's ribbon chute, a useful contraption throughout the game.

➔ If you've already played *MDK2* on Dreamcast, don't be fooled by the addition of *Armageddon* to the name — the gameplay is identical on PS2. However, this shouldn't dissuade anyone new to *MDK2*. Simply put, this is one of the most enjoyable action games on any system.

MDK2's main strength lies in its gameplay variety. You control one of three characters, each offering a unique style of play: Kurt (the Doc's janitor), Max (the Doc's latest creation), or the Doctor himself. When playing as Kurt, gameplay is a mixture of action and adventure, accompanied by a few basic puzzles. Since Max can wield four guns simultaneously, the focus of his levels is usually action, although some intense platforming comes into play. Finally, the Doctor's objectives mostly involve solving puzzles (defuse bombs and traps, and combining objects into useful tools).

■ Max does the "two-fisted John Woo shooting" thing one better — he's got four fists



The transition to PS2 has enabled a few minor enhancements in control and framerate. Dual analog sticks make looking around much more comfortable; instead of controlling the camera with the buttons, the job is handled by the right stick. Movement is even more fluid and precise, thanks to the constant 60fps framerate.

MDK2 does suffer from a few small problems. Chief

among them, certain bosses and enemies can be unfairly challenging, and a few of the puzzles are a bit obscure. As a result, there are moments of extreme frustration and aimless wandering around.

Nevertheless, *MDK2* is excellent, and the few problems don't detract much from the overall experience. For a solid action title for PS2, look no further. — Chester Barber

NextGen ★★★★★

Bottom Line: This is easily one of the best action games available for PS2. Although it's not very different from the DC version, if you've never played it, you owe it to yourself to try it.

■ The auto-aim locks on the chest, which makes one-shot head kills problematic



■ PLAYSTATION 2

Red Faction

■ Publisher: THQ ■ Developer: Volition

The best single-player FPS yet for PS2

→ A number of quality first-person shooters have already appeared on PS2, but none has provided a solid single-player mode — ironic, given that's an integral element on a console. However, *Red Faction* steps in to change this with a solid single-player game that's easily on par with the better PSX and N64 shooters.

You begin as an oppressed miner working on Mars. When *Red Faction*

workers begin dying, and the guys in charge — the Blue Faction — refuse to improve the unhealthy working conditions, your character rises up as the leader of a revolt.

Fortunately, *RF* offers more than just a workable premise; gameplay variety and interesting weapons are its main strengths. Missions range from covert operations to chaotic battles in armored vehicles. The weapons, while a bit standard, offer a few unique features. For example, the Rail Driver, (obviously aping the railgun in Schwarzenegger's *Eraser*) enables you to kill enemies through walls and doors.

Unfortunately, there are

a few flaws. First, the covert missions are a bit unpolished. In particular, the distance you must maintain from enemies so they won't identify you is inconsistent. Sometimes they can spot you from afar, and other times you can almost walk right past them. Second, the control isn't very precise. While movement in general is fine, precision aiming proves to be a hassle. THQ has implemented an auto-aim feature to compensate, but since it locks onto the chest area, trying for head shots to conserve ammo is impossible. Somebody really needs to solve this problem on consoles, or even just take advantage of those nifty PS2 USB ports for mouse support.

Overall though, *Red Faction* is as solid as they come. — Chester Barber



■ The rest of the gameplay and storyline easily overcome the game's few faults

NextGen ★★★★★

Bottom Line: Although *Red Faction* isn't the most inventive FPS out there, it proves to be worthy with a solid single-player mode.

Heroes of Might and Magic: Quest for the Dragon Bone Staff

■ Platform: PlayStation 2 ■ Publisher: 3DO

■ Developer: New World Computing

Strange but true: *Quest for the Dragon Bone Staff* isn't exactly *Heroes of Might and Magic* for PS2. In fact, it's actually an "update" (practically a port) of the ancient *King's Bounty* for Genesis. This is not a bad thing. Really.

You have a hero that goes around the countryside collecting treasure, building armies, and engaging in grid-style, turn-based combat. (The main game isn't turn-based; only the combat is.) There's no town construction, hero recruitment, or castle maintenance — just your single hero, his or her group of soldiers, and a timed quest to recover a powerful artifact. The action moves at a quick, addictive pace, and the entire game has been redone in 3D.



■ If you remember *King's Bounty* for Genesis as fondly as we do, you'll love this 3D update

To be honest, the new 3D engine isn't much to look at, but the gameplay is all there. Random locations for enemies as well as items, four different continents to explore, and multiple character classes that really do matter add a lot of replay value. Only the lack of multiplayer modes and a terrible manual hurt this new look at an old favorite. — Daniel Erickson

NextGen ★★★★★

Bottom Line: Not as deep as the PC series it's named after, but just as fun and much more accessible.

Triple Play Baseball

■ Platform: PlayStation 2 ■ Publisher: EA Sports

■ Developer: EA Sports

EA Sports has actually created a game as pretty, if not prettier, than its own *Madden 2001*. And even if this year's *Triple Play* shows that EA is content to continue the indiscretions of this long-running series, that's OK — we're as willing to look at it in the fresh light of PS2 and gape at the amazing visuals like everybody else.

Nowhere else in console sports games will you find the incredible production value of *Triple Play*. The stadiums are amazingly rendered, and you can even hear hot dog vendors and courtesy call announcements in the background. There are specific camera angles for every imaginable play half a dozen different wipes, and brilliant replays. Should you leave the game alone for a few moments without pausing, the camera will focus on a random player and the announcers will discuss his performance. When



■ This is one fine-looking game of pseudo-baseball

the crowd gets excited, it even starts doing the Wave.

There's so much detail, in fact, that you might miss what EA Sports left out: actual baseball. *Triple Play* is a fast-paced, offense-happy slugfest that offers hardly a trace of our national pastime's strategic elements. No pitcher duels, no stat fanatic's scorecards, no tactical base running, nothing. This is arcade baseball that's easy to play and gorgeous, but don't expect the real thing, or you're likely to rush the mound. — Daniel Erickson

NextGen ★★★★★

Bottom Line: It's drop-dead gorgeous and fun at parties, but it'll disappoint sim fans to no end.

ESPN MLS Extra Time

■ Platform: **PlayStation 2** ■ Publisher: **Konami** ■ Developer: **Konami**

In the match up between Konami's ESPN MLS Extra Time and EA Sports' FIFA, it's been a scoreless draw to this point, with both games playing hard. Weirdly, in the end it's come down to style over substance, although frankly the qualitative differences are so minor that you can't really pick wrong.

MLS has a few tiny problems, including some occasionally weak graphics and less-than-stellar weather effects, plus a couple of jarring camera angles. Where it succeeds is in its depiction of the fluid European passing game and its arcade-like yet somehow faithful rendition of the world's most popular sport.

Master the initially shallow controls, and you'll discover a rich depth of previously unseen subtlety — practice makes perfect. Better use of analog control would have been welcome though; this is effectively a digital game.

NextGen ★★★★★

Bottom Line: This is one of two near-perfect renditions of the sport. PS2 soccer fans are spoiled indeed.



■ **MLS Extra Time manages to just edge out FIFA for the PS2 soccer crown**

The graphical problems are limited to set pieces like corner and goal kicks, and the almost disposable MLS license is boosted by the inclusion of International squads (with fake player names of course). The in-game options to switch camera angles and radar views are welcome extras, and the usual plethora of match, league, and multiplayer modes are present. But what this really offers is a smooth, brisk continuation of the standard set by *International Superstar Soccer*, and that's enough to score and win. — Frank O'Connor

Star Wars Super Bombad Racing

■ Platform: **PlayStation 2** ■ Publisher: **Lucas Learning**
■ Developer: **Lucas Learning**

From its big-headed Episode I characters to the "goofy" soundtrack, it's clear that *Super Bombad Racing* is aimed squarely at kids. No real problem there, except that the tracks (of which there are nine, plus four arenas), quickly change from "so simple they're boring" to "so complicated they're frustrating" by about the third or fourth one in.

To give the Dark Side its due, it should be noted that (big heads aside) the graphics are quite nice, with an impressively far-off draw distance and, in single-player mode, a decent sense of speed, though the framerate drops significantly with two or more players. Every track is crowded with detail and ruthlessly faithful to the Star Wars universe (again, except for the big heads), and there's a healthy list of



■ **If you like your Episode I characters with giant heads... Aw, just forget it**

weapons and other power-ups.

The trouble is in that the track designs are pointlessly convoluted. There are plenty of hidden shortcuts, but often just following the standard route is enough of a puzzle. The way the camera follows the karts as they dip and roll often leaves you confused as to where you're heading or how to turn next. Lastly, and it must be said, the "goofy" soundtrack is positively the most annoying game music we've heard in years. — Jeff Lundrigan

NextGen ★★☆☆☆

Bottom Line: We've said it before, but the world really does not need another licensed kart racing game.

■ **PLAYSTATION 2**

Escape from Monkey Island

■ Publisher: **LucasArts** ■ Developer: **LucasArts**

It was the best of games, it was the worst of games...

■ **We're pleased to report that the PS2 version's graphics and sound are identical to the PC version**



Enter the International House of Mojo

➔ The *Monkey Island* adventure game series can usually be counted for a number of things: first, top-notch production values; second, drop-dead funny dialogue, characters, and situations; last, utterly inscrutable puzzles that defy "point A to point B" logic. This latest in the series continues all these traditions, with feeling.

This PS2 version is virtually identical to the PC version we reviewed some months ago (*NG 02/01*). While the game engine was taken from LucasArts' own *Grim Fandango*, it adapts well to the Dual Shock controller. Really, though, this is no surprise, considering the PC version was controlled by four direction keys and a few buttons. Indeed, the "3D characters over 2D backgrounds" approach is a console natural, seen far more often in the likes of *Resident Evil* than point-and-click PC adventures.

The graphics, voice, music, and everything else



Look at frilly pink ship

■ **And at the end of the day, this is one of the funnier games we've played in a long, long time**

have been ported perfectly as well. As a result, *Escape from Monkey Island* is exactly the same experience on PS2 as it was on PC. In fact, in some ways it may be even better, if you're one of many whose home entertainment system offers a bigger monitor and better sound than your PC system.

Once again, though, as entertaining as this is, be prepared to bang your head against the wall trying to figure out the puzzles. And, in this case, the walk-through that was included with the PC version has been pared down to a sparse four pages. Good luck. — Jeff Lundrigan

NextGen ★★★★★

Bottom Line: The puzzles are as inscrutable as ever, but if you have the patience, this is one terrifically entertaining game.



■ The game earns its **M** rating honestly. Not only will you find gore galore, but some truly disturbing imagery and hints of nudity as well

■ **DREAMCAST**

Illbleed

■ Publisher: **AIA** ■ Developer: **Climax**

The horror... The horror...

→ Survival horror games are becoming almost as ubiquitous as first-person shooters, so it's nice to see at least one that tries something different. And as far as being different goes, *Illbleed* succeeds very well. Trouble is, it also suffers from a rather uneven design, and bares its relatively low-budget craftsmanship almost as readily as the B-movie horrors it's patterned after.

Our hero is Eriko Christy, president of her high school "Horror Movie Research Club" (shyeah, right). After

three of her friends disappear inside of Illbleed — a giant, horror-themed amusement park with a \$100-million prize — Christy enters the park herself to try to find them.

The main gameplay dynamic hinges on a series of sense meters, which tell you when danger is around by sight, smell, sound, and a "sixth sense." Then you use your "horror meter" to flag certain items in the environment, which enables you to disarm the spooky traps. Combat segments and adventure-style puzzles round out the gameplay over six stages.

There are more than a few problems. While generally the clues are almost too plentiful, on occasion the game simply cuts you adrift

with no clue what to do at all. Worse, the control is not very finely tuned, which sometimes makes the action scenes an exercise in sheer frustration. You can't carry items from one stage to the next, meaning you have to buy new stuff before each one. This also forces you to find a new horror meter each and every time, so getting caught by certain traps is inevitable. Unfair.

However, if it's a little slow-going, the gameplay still mostly works. It can get pretty intense, with the graphics and sound (usually) building to a very creepy atmosphere. And if you're itching for a game full of freaky shocks and a macabre sense of humor, this is it. — Jeff Lundrigan

ENextGen ★★☆☆☆

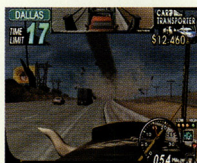
Bottom Line: If you love horror movies, or just want something different in a survival horror game, there's enough good stuff here to make it worth overlooking the annoying parts.

18 Wheeler: American Pro Trucker

■ Platform: **Dreamcast** ■ Publisher: **Sega** ■ Developer: **AM2**

Despite its roller-coaster ride in the console market, Sega has been steadily successful when it comes to arcade games. From *Golden Axe* to *Virtua Fighter 3*, Sega always had the knack of getting you to pull one more token out of your pocket in your attempt to get a little bit farther. Unfortunately, that formula doesn't work at home — specifically after you've shelled out 40 to 50 bucks for a game and wind up beating it in a day. The Dreamcast version of *18 Wheeler* does add a bit of extra value when compared to the arcade original, but this sweet ride is still very short.

The four stages of the arcade game — condensing a cross-country trip down to about 15 minutes — are graphically pleasing and a load of fun, as you battle an evil trucker to be the first to arrive at the destination. The trucks handle just like you



■ Sometimes you'll have to battle the elements, as well as the traffic, in order to get to your destination before your opponent

might imagine they would, and you really get a sense of being in control of a big rig as you smash through both traffic and roadblocks that hide shortcuts. There are also parking challenges and four courses that give you three laps to score as many points as possible. Unfortunately, online play was scrapped in order to get the game out sooner, so you'll have to settle for spitscreen action against someone sitting in the same room. — Rob Smolka

ENextGen ★★☆☆☆

Bottom Line: *18 Wheeler* is definitely worth a weekend rental, but its lack of online play and limited number of stages in the arcade game flatten its tires.

Confidential Mission

■ Platform: **Dreamcast** ■ Publisher: **Sega** ■ Developer: **Sega**

While senators and parent groups may want to outlaw light gun games like *Confidential Mission*, the fact is that the genre is so moribund that it's likely to suffer a creative death rather than a legislative one (See *Time Crisis: Project Titan*, page 86). Clearly modeled after the excellent *Virtua Cop* series, *Confidential Mission* does nothing to spice up the gameplay, with the same "justice" and "combo" shots we've seen before.

What's worse is that not only does it add nothing to what's been done before, it even subtracts quite a bit — in this case variety and gameplay. There are only three paltry levels here, each of which can be safely negotiated in only a few minutes. There's some very minor branching within each mission, but hardly enough to entice most people to replay the game once they've won.

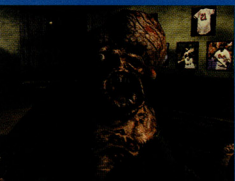


■ As gun games go, *Confidential Mission* is about as basic as you can get

The world of *Confidential Mission* is not only short but also devoid of interesting features. Graphically the game is merely respectable, and there are no hidden extras inside the trashcans, vases, or barrels — a disappointing omission given that just about every rail gunner in existence surprises players with bonuses. But what's not surprising is that such a bland and feeble game would be rushed out the door during the last days of Dreamcast. — Jim Preston

ENextGen ★★☆☆☆

Bottom Line: We vote no confidence.



■ Certain boss characters are invincible, right up until the moment when, for no reason, they just aren't

■ DREAMCAST

Spider-Man

■ Publisher: Activision ■ Developer: Treyarch/Neversoft

Get into the swing

➔ As of late, mediocre superhero games have wreaked more havoc on innocent victims than the Legion of Doom in its prime. Activision changed that with its eminently playable *Spider-Man* for PlayStation and N64. This is the token Dreamcast port, replete with enhanced

visuals and virtually identical web-slingin' antics.

It still works. Comic book aficionados will drool over the most accurate re-creation of Peter Parker's adventures to date. Using a magnificently workmanlike interface, you can swing between rooftops, craft gooey cocoons and pro-

tective domes, or spout off teeth-grating one-liners with ease. You'll also find hidden costumes, collectible comic covers, and healthy doses of superhuman gameplay.

But even the noblest pastimes have a downside. In this case, it's a naughty camera angle that shifts perspectives — and thus your control scheme — on a whim. Playing through various intense scenarios (subway car roof rides, helicopter chases, etc.) is difficult enough without dynamically changing gamepad commands. Frustration sets in early, with episodic challenges requiring countless attempts before they're overcome.

Patience is a virtue, however. Newly polished visuals and superb voiceovers are your reward for being persistent, even if the droll cut

DREAMCAST **Finals**



■ The game features a number of heavy-duty Spidey foes to challenge your arachnid reflexes

scenes seem more of a punishment. Much better, the astounding soundtrack ranges from techno to a remixed Spidey theme song. Thanks to the hard-hitting presentation, laying the smack down on goons like Venom and Doctor Octopus feels like more of a joy than a civic duty.

Spider-Man for Dreamcast is easy to get into, hard to put down, and even trickier to progress through. A couple of small design flaws hold this back from the peak of greatness, but even without the help of web canisters, you'll still be glued to the screen.

— Scott Steinberg

NextGen ★★★★★

Bottom Line: A fun but slightly flawed superhero action adventure that'll have you bouncing off the walls. Literally.



■ The graphics have been improved quite a bit from previous versions, although gameplay is nearly identical



■ These guys would be much more threatening if they didn't look so much like the Village People

PLAYSTATION

Time Crisis: Project Titan

■ Publisher: Namco ■ Developer: Namco

Untimely as it gets

➔ Namco and Sega seem to be the only companies taking a shot at gun games these days (with Konami's Silent Scope series hanging in the background), but even they seem to be running out of ammo. With the *Time Crisis* series, Namco deepened gameplay by giving players the ability to take cover behind crates or around doorways. You don't take damage while under cover, but you can't see your enemies' positions or fire back at them. Unfortunately, in *Project Titan*, a PSOne exclusive, the dodge button also reloads, and while it would make sense to take cover while reloading during a real-life gunfight, we'd prefer the option to simply stand fast and keep

our eyes on the target. The game itself shoots far wide of the standards set by Namco's excellent arcade gunners. The



■ Unlike many other modern gun games, you don't get to shoot from cars or boats or trains — you're always on foot

NextGen ★★★★★

Bottom Line: PlayStation finally answers Saturn's *Virtua Cop 2*, only it's five years too late and shooting blanks.

graphics are passable, but not fantastic, and the GunCon feels a bit sluggish. Worse, there is no two-player mode whatsoever, and the routes lack dynamic action scenes like the rail battle in *Time Crisis 2* or the car chase in *Virtua Cop 2*. In fact, despite the dodge button, this plays a bit too much like a poor man's knock-off of the five-year-old original. — Eric Bratcher

Mat Hoffman's Pro BMX

■ Platform: PlayStation ■ Publisher: Activision
■ Developer: Runecraft/Shaba Games

Well, we'll go ahead and repeat it again: This is *Tony Hawk's Pro Skater* on a BMX bike. It's got the same three-button control scheme; the same mix of skate parks and urban sprawls to trick around in; and the same "earn X number of trick points," "collect letters," "break stuff" goals. And, just like *Tony Hawk*, completing these goals opens up new parks and areas.

Which doesn't mean it's at all bad. Actually, it points out just how much life the original *Tony Hawk* engine has left. The physics model is subtly different — a BMX bike relies more on grinds and less on air tricks (although you'll still spend a lot of time airborne). The bike is "heavier," needs more room to turn, and it's trickier to nail a landing. The parks and other areas



■ If you liked *Tony Hawk*, chances are you'll enjoy *Mat Hoffman* almost as much

are also a bit more claustrophobic and it's a little less obvious about which way to head next than in the *Tony Hawk* series, although it's not especially confusing either.

Indeed, on the whole this is quite a lot of fun. It's two-year-old fun, but fun all the same. And among the wasteland that is the current PlayStation lineup, that's good enough. — Jeff Lundrigan

NextGen ★★★★★

Bottom Line: Even two years later, the *Tony Hawk* engine makes a monkey out of the likes of *Razor Scooter* — which is, weirdly enough, this game's only immediate competition on PlayStation.

The Simpsons Wrestling

■ Platform: PlayStation ■ Publisher: Activision
■ Developer: Fox Interactive

In our E3 coverage last year (**NG 07/00**), we named *The Simpsons Wrestling* as one of the Worst of Show. Perhaps predictably, a year later, nothing has changed. Really.

Imagine a ringside brawler where skill and finesse mean zip. Next, picture a set of pre-programmed special moves that serve up less impact than a midget grappler's drop kick. For the coup de grace, base everything on a combat model that operates according to staccato button-mashing and little else. All this and more can be yours, complete with oh-so-mature signature maneuvers such as Barney's belch and Apu's self-styled "kick-ass kung fu."

It's not even as goofy as it sounds. Some authentic speech clips are included, but nothing



■ Don't say we didn't give you plenty of warning; this is one of the worst games of the year

masks the horrific, jaggy blunder that are the graphics — this is simply the ugliest use of cel shading we've ever seen. If Flanders could only see the atrocities contained herein, he'd renounce his religion.

Ludicrously primitive gameplay and a botched concept will leave you punch-drunk and reeling for the ropes. In the immortal words of Homer... "D'oh!" — Scott Steinberg

NextGen ★☆☆☆☆

Bottom Line: A horrific, licensed beat-'em-up that's so terrible it will actually make you grateful most companies opt for kart racers instead.



■ Ah, the Satchel Charge. It's the perfect way to eliminate enemies in enclosed areas



■ The ELF drains enemies' energy, basically making them immobile targets for teammates to obliterate



■ PC

Tribes 2

■ Publisher: **Dynamix** ■ Developer: **Dynamix**

The bar has been raised for team-based multiplayer action

➔ When the original *Tribes* came out inconspicuously at the end of 1998, it started a quiet revolution. Equipping every player with jumpjets, combined with enormous indoor/outdoor maps and useful, distinctive player classes, *Tribes* became an almost instant classic. After many delays *Tribes 2* has finally been released, and it was well worth the wait.

Instead of going off in a different direction or simply adding more maps and a new weapon or two, Dynamix has re-created the original game from scratch and crowded it with new items and features. There are now six vehicles, turrets with interchangeable barrels, new grenade types, and much more, all running on a brand-new graphics engine that, if you've got the system to handle it, is gorgeous.

For the uninitiated, *Tribes 2* is an FPS with varying objectives (though the third-person perspective is available). The most

popular goal is Capture the Flag, but variations like Capture and Hold, Siege, Hunters, Rabbit, and Deathmatch are all available. What makes this so endearing (and addictive) is its level of complexity. Bases have to be defended, flags captured, and vehicles destroyed — all in realtime. After equipping the proper armaments, you and your team have to set up turrets, sensors, radars, remote inventory stations, and other amenities. And that's in the first two minutes of play.

To win, a team has to be very well coordinated. Not everyone can go for the flag, but not everyone can simply stay on defense either. Every member of a team has to take on a role and stick with it, and each role has its own intricacies. Many have logged hundreds of hours and are still discovering new techniques.

The system requirements are a concern. You need at least a 600MHz CPU, 128MB of



■ The green explosion of the mortar has an enormous splash damage range

RAM and a 32MB non-Voodoo 3D accelerator — Voodoo cards have been struggling with this game, although patches have addressed this to a degree. The good news is this is quite playable on a 56k connection, even with 50 or more players at once. New community features make it easy to find players, create tribes, and get help in general, but be warned: This is as addictive as sugar-coated crack.

— Kevin Rice

BIATHLON OF THE FUTURE

Like rocket jumping in *Quake*, skiing in the original *Tribes* was an "accident" that enabled you to build up immense speed. In *Tribes 2* you're taught the basics of skiing during the training missions, and many maps are designed with it in mind. Of course, you're free to shoot while skiing, although it's a rough technique to master. Players also try to pick off skiers on the common routes, which has become a game in itself. We'd like to see how *Picabo Street* would fare under these conditions.

NextGen ★★★★★

Bottom Line: It's not terribly friendly toward newbies, and the system requirements are stiff, but wow... There's nothing else this incredibly good for team-based multiplayer mayhem.



■ PC

Fallout Tactics: Brotherhood of Steel

■ Publisher: Interplay ■ Developer: Micro Forté

Postmodern post-apocalypse

→ First, let's get the moles and warts out of the way: This is not *Fallout III*. If you expect the usual gameplay in which you roam through post-apocalyptic devastation at leisure, you'll be disappointed. This is hot, heavy, squad-based combat, with up to six well-armed team members undertaking a string of linear missions. You may also encounter a few minor glitches along the way, including an inventory bug that can cause items to disappear from a squad

member's stash, and occasional pathfinding problems that permit team members to walk into withering gunfire by accident.

That said, *Fallout Tactics* is one hell of a playground and should satisfy the pickiest of fans. The familiar *Fallout* universe is recreated faithfully, with excellent visuals, voice work, and the dark, off-color humor that peppered earlier versions. You'll battle raiders, deathclaws, and super mutants; face bloody, random encounters in the wasteland; loot dead enemies; and deal with familiar RPG character points. Even the tactical combat system will remind you of earlier games.

Still, the differences are vivid. The squad-based

combat is intense, with both realtime and turn-based playing modes. Choice of play mode will dictate strategy. Realtime complicates team control, yet lends a real sense of urgency and enables blistering firefights. Turn-based combat, familiar to *Fallout* regulars, simplifies team management but slows the pace. Missions can take two to four hours to complete.

Even with its blemishes, *Tactics* is sure to catch eyes across a crowded room. Get ready for the inevitable. Whether you're a *Fallout* regular who hasn't yet tried squad combat, or a tactical combat vet who's never experienced the *Fallout* series, this one will steal your breath away and make you a convert. — John Lee

■ NextGen ★★★★★

Bottom Line: A treat for *Fallout* and strategy fans alike.



■ Later missions expose you to powerful mechanical enemies

Evil Islands: Curse of the Lost Soul

■ Platform: PC ■ Publisher: Fishtank Interactive

■ Developer: Nival Interactive

Anyone familiar with fantasy role-playing games will be right at home with *Evil Islands*. A young man wakes up remembering only his name. Villagers call him the Chosen, and before long he's caught up in his unknown destiny.

The character creation system is a unique pleasure. Instead of choosing classes, you allocate earned experience points into any of a number of skills. The graphics look good, and the ambient sounds are excellent. But the voice acting is some of the worst ever, and since it's paired with terrible dialogue, talking to people can be a chore.

Evil Islands' main flaw, however, is that it's simply all much harder than it needs to be. The game is stingy with treasure and experience,



■ They may not be outnumbered, but don't bet that the heroes will win this battle

and even on Novice difficulty enemies score random, critical hits so often that it's not unusual to have to replay a single battle ten times. Even the weakest of creatures can, and frequently will, kill with a single blow, leaving most players to likely throw their hands up in frustration and move on to something else. — Carla Harker

■ NextGen ★★★★★

Bottom Line: *Evil Islands* ain't all bad, but it would be a lot more enjoyable if it weren't made so absurdly difficult by random chance.

Fate of the Dragon

■ Platform: PC ■ Publisher: Eidos ■ Developer: Overmax Studio

The worry with any RTS game that offers more depth and resources to utilize is that it will be impossible to control efficiently. Luckily, *Fate of the Dragon* manages to have a deep yet simple-to-control resource management system, and an easy-to-maintain military structure that includes heroes, war machines, and experience ranking.

You control one of three warlords in second-century China, fighting over the empire during the bloodthirsty Three Kingdoms period. The game's beautiful graphics were designed using historical materials from the period and certainly hold their own against any other 2D sprite-based game on the market. The buildings and men are texturally detailed and well animated, making this a pleasure to look at.

What does make the game stand out is that the developers have included many design elements that should logically have always been part of these games.



■ Fate of the Dragon offers realtime strategy in medieval China, and if that sounds good to you, the game ain't bad

For example, instead of building cavalry as a unit, you combine an infantry unit and a horse. Need more laborers? Simply demote some troops to do the scut work, then retrain them for conflict.

Add in *Sim City*-style disasters, sacrifices to gods, politics, an engaging storyline, and around 100 scientific advancements to research, and you get a solid strategy game. Sadly though, the strength of the design does not extend to the missions themselves, which are slightly repetitive and not particularly exciting. — Lee Cummings

■ NextGen ★★★★★

Bottom Line: If you're a veteran RTS gamer looking for something new, this is certainly worth a look.

Kohan: Immortal Sovereigns

■ Platform: PC ■ Publisher: Strategy First ■ Developer: TimeGate

Try this on for size. *Kohan* is a blend of fantasy, realtime strategy, and wargaming.

Yeah, OK, so you've heard that before. About lots of games. But don't start snoozing yet; *Kohan* actually serves up a few innovations. True, the usual mix of monsters, sorcerers, and magic amulets is vividly present. There are resources to gather, gold to hoard, as well as armies to recruit and send into combat.

However, micromanagement takes a back seat this time. Click a button, spend some gold, and a mine or a sawmill is quickly built and goes to work, without little ant-like peasant figures running back and forth, gathering and storing goodies.

Company-based combat is the focus here. Armies are diversified, with stronger units available as cities improve and prerequisites are met, while heroes with special abilities lead the armies. When armies



■ When *Kohan*'s armies engage, they fill the screen with activity and sounds of battle

suffer losses they retreat to nearby cities to regroup. There's no rush to see who can build the biggest army the fastest, because monster troops are scattered over the map, and victory is assured only by massing your armies and moving on one enemy at a time.

Kohan is colorful, fun to play, and really quite charming. Its initial several levels are also pretty easy, so newcomers to strategy gaming will have space to learn as they go. Veterans are advised to hang in there though, as things do get challenging later. — John Lee

➔ NextGen ★★☆☆☆

Bottom Line: Innovation and simplicity are the super attributes here, and even if you've pretty much seen all this before, it's still quite a ride.

X-COM Enforcer

■ Platform: PC ■ Publisher: Infogrames ■ Developer: Microprose

Giving *Enforcer* the X-COM name has put half the hardcore X-COM fans into grand-mal seizures. Forget the squad-based strategy you've come to love; *Enforcer* is a super-simple, third-person-perspective action game based on the *Unreal* engine. Kill aliens, move forward, rinse, and repeat until finished.

As you run through the levels killing aliens, don't forget to grab data points, technology power-ups, and hidden letters. Data points are used to upgrade technology on the *Enforcer*; power-ups are used to unlock new technologies; and the hidden letters unlock bonus levels. The bonus levels are only focused on getting extra data points, but they do turn out to be among the few inspired aspects of *Enforcer*, because some of them are based on old videogames. For instance,



■ You deal plenty of damage in *Enforcer*, but where's the love?

there's a Pac-Man-inspired level in which you run the *Enforcer* through a 3D maze with aliens as ghosts.

Beyond that, though, what you'll find is incredibly repetitive gameplay that mimics the fun of an old arcade shooter. Unfortunately, that straightforward mindlessness isn't the same fun as it used to be. For \$30 — that's 120 quarters — it's just not worth it. Looking for mindless action? Go buy *Serious Sam*. — Jason Samuel

➔ NextGen ★★☆☆☆

Bottom Line: It's fast and furious, but ultimately too shallow for the price.

■ PC

Myst III: Exile

■ Publisher: Ubi Soft ■ Developer: Presto Studios

We don't believe it



■ The graphics are still pretty static, but at least this time there's some logic behind all the pretty scenery

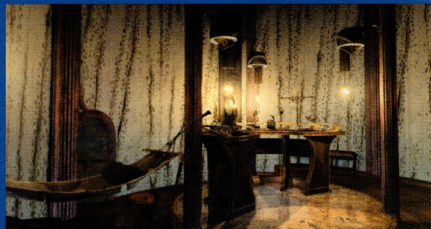
➔ *Myst* is such a phenomenon that even people without any real interest in computer gaming have heard of it. With millions of copies in the hands of the public at large, it came as no surprise that the developers agreed to let Presto Studios create a third installment. *Myst III: Exile* is the result, and fans of the series will find that the game is as much a labor of love for Presto as the original was for Cyan. Taking place several years after *Myst* and *Riven*, *Exile* introduces a new villain and five new Ages to explore.

Though it wouldn't seem possible, *Exile* is even more beautiful than the previous games, which pretty much makes it one of the best-looking games ever made. The voice acting is very well done, and the ambient music and sounds create just the right atmosphere of isolation.

Exile has a more interesting and engaging storyline than previous *Myst* titles, and the puzzles have far more relevance to the actual story. You're even likely to understand why you're solving a particular puzzle this time — even if you're still sketchy on how. Things may still be too



■ In *J'Nanin*, no one can hear you scream



slow for the less patient, but anyone who is willing to sit back, relax, and think will find a title that delivers on what *Myst* had always promised. — Carla Harker

➔ NextGen ★★☆☆☆

Bottom Line: Although we're stunned to admit it, *Myst III: Exile* is one of the best adventure games to come out in some time.

Gamer's Guide

You want to know what games are worth your cash and time?

Well, you've come to the right place...

Welcome to the Gamer's Guide, your insanely popular resource to what's worth buying and what's not even worth a glance. Each month, we update the list with every game we've reviewed since the last time and cull out older stuff. Which older stuff? Well, mostly old or bad games, especially PC titles, but aging console titles, too. We leave in

just about every title that ever got ★★★★★ though, since they're almost always a good bet, no matter how old they get. (Although it is worth taking note of which issue it was reviewed in, since time and technology march on, and a game that scored ★★★★★ a couple of years ago might only score ★★★ today.)

	title	publisher	rating	#		title	publisher	rating	#
PlayStation 2 Adventures of Cookie & Cream, The Aqua Aqua Armored Core 2 ATV Offroad Fury Bouncer, The DOA2: Hardcore Driving Emotion Type-5 DrumMania (Japan) Dynasty Warriors 2 ESPN International Track & Field Bernal Ring Ageatec FI: Championship Season 2000 Fantasia (Japan) Gradus II and IV Gungum Baze Kengo Master of Bushido Knockout Kings 2001 Madmen NFL 2001 Midnight Club Street Racing Moto GP NASCAR 2001 NBA Live 2001 NCAA Final Four 2001 NCAA Football 2001 NFL GameDay 2001 NFL 2001 NHL Faceoff 2001 Oni Orphen Scout of Sorcery Q-Ball Billards Master RC Revenge Pro Ready 2 Rumble Boxing Round 2 Ridge Racer Ridge Racer V Ring of Red Shadow of Destiny Silent Scope Silence: The Last Planet Sky Odyssey Sky Surfer (Japan) Smuggler's Run SSX Star Wars Starfighter Stepping Selection (Japan) Street Fighter EX3 Summer Super Puzzle Bobble (Japan) Surfing H3O Swing Away Golf Tekken Tag Tournament Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles TimeSplitters Top Gear Drivemaster Unreal Tournament WDL Thunder Tanks Wind Rider Winback X Squad	Ageatec 3DO Ageatec ATV Sonic Techno Square Konami Konami Konami EA Sports From Software Ageatec EA Sports Sony Konami Working Designs Crave Crave EA Sports Rockstar EA Sports EA Sports EA Sports 989 Sports 989 Sports EA Sports Rockstar 989 Sports Capcom Activision Take 2 Interactive Accolade Midway Infogrames Namco Konami Konami EA Sports Namco Konami Konami Namco THQ Taito Take 2 Interactive Electronic Arts Namco Electronic Arts Edios Konami Infogrames 3DO Electronic Arts Koei Electronic Arts	★★★★ ★★★★ ★★★★ ★★★★ ★★★★ ★★★★★ 							

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→ Letters

Mail bonding

→ Hi, I enjoyed your article in the May 2001 issue of **Next Generation** about homebrew games for the classic systems. However, you completely glossed over the possibility of new games made for NES, SNES, and Genesis, labeling those systems as "too hard" to program for. Well, even though 16-bit systems are complicated to program for, games have been made on them — not necessarily finished and polished games, but games nonetheless. Demos have also been made on N64, Dreamcast, and beyond. It simply isn't limited to Vectrex and Atari 2600 games anymore.

The good ol' NES is in a similar situation. Although detailed technical information was hard to come by until recently, several coders have struggled to release demos and games for this system. I released a game called

Solar Wars in 1999, the first homemade NES game since Ian Bell's *Elite*. Now, other games are being made for this system. (I am currently working on a tribute to the classic arcade game *Asteroids* on the NES.)

One must not also forget the gigantic amateur development scene that has popped up on Game Boy. I'm surprised that you scarcely mentioned this system. Are you perhaps shying away from reporting on homebrew developments on Nintendo's systems for fear of reprisal by the big "N"? I sincerely hope not. I also hope that your coverage of homemade games was simply the first part in a series of reports on various systems.

Thanks for taking the time to read this, and I hope I have generated some interest, which I'm sure already exists, in homemade

games for more modern consoles.

Chris Covell

Via email

<http://mypage.direct.ca/c/ccovell>
Solar Wars (NES) Homepage

Kevin Toyama responds:

Thanks for your feedback. I'm glad you enjoyed the article. The reason it was limited to pre-NES systems is that the developers/publishers actually burn cartridges of their games and sell them (with the exception of Intellivision Lives, which we included to illustrate the challenges of publishing games for old systems). During the course of our research, we discovered many games like yours that run on emulators, but we felt that being able to play the new games on their original systems was more the spirit in which the story was intended.

When will we have real lifelike games? Are we stuck forever in a silicon-like world in terms of videogames? I would really like to have your opinion on this.

RS. Believe it or not, your magazine is also quite popular here in Mexico, so... "mantengan el buen trabajo" (keep up the good work).

Raymundo Ochoa

Via email

→ I have been playing games since the 8-bit days. I've played all kinds of games: beat-'em-ups, RPGs, survival horror, sports games. My question is, why are awful games always being released? I'm tired of games, and game developers for that matter, that just plain suck in spite of the technology available. I mean, shouldn't games now have all the best gameplay, graphics, and appeal? This isn't the 8-bit days, when you could have excuses like, "Oh, the system isn't powerful enough for the concept and design of our game." I don't want to hear excuses — what I want is to play some decent games for cryin' out loud! If the game systems are as revolutionary as they claim, shouldn't the games that are made for them be too? I just can't tell you how angry I am.

"JV Kenshin"

Via email

Actually JV, you could ask the same question of movies, TV shows, books, and music. It isn't just videogaming that has to suffer through mountains of lackluster product. But you and Raymundo raise a point. There has been a lack of imagination and quality in the copycat products out there — something that has long plagued this industry — and it has only become more obvious in light of the new technology. When a developer is faced with a new system, there's always a learning curve, and unfortunately, the aggressive launch schedules of

SHEN WHEN? (AGAIN)

→ I'm sure that you have received a ton of letters regarding a release of *Shenmue 2* for Dreamcast, but have you found out any more information on the *Shenmue* sequel, and when is it going to come out?

Jeff Mabey

Via email

Sega still hasn't set an official release date for *Shenmue 2*, although at the time we write this, sources say Yu Suzuki and crew are very close to having it all wrapped up. Best guess: late summer in Japan, fall in the U.S.



■ Dreamcast owners fear not: *Shenmue 2* is still headed our way, hopefully this year

→ I was going through some old (well, not that old — from 1998) issues of your magazine and noticed something quite funny: Some of the games looked as if they have been published last week! What I mean with this is that it seems to me that there hasn't been a real change in videogames in the three years since. Today we are in a gap where nothing actually happens because everything is put away in expectation of Xbox and other next-generation consoles, but are they really offering anything different? Sure we can read about hundreds of millions of polygons, but the games will continue to feel like the old *Virtua Fighter* — just with smoother graphics — because the concept remains the same. Take, for instance, EA's *NFS: Hot Pursuit* (1998) and you'll find that except for some minor details, its graphics and feeling are just the same as that found in the latest racing games available. I see new games and ask myself, isn't this pretty much the same that we were playing three years ago?

the hardware manufacturer don't give many developers as much time to get to know the system before games must be shipped. PlayStation 2 was a textbook example of this, and we know right now that final, fully functional Xbox dev kits are making their way to developers, just several months shy of the launch of the system.

However, while it's true that the changes in gaming have been less immediately noticeable since the paradigm shift to 3D some years ago, they have been real: improvements in AI, more realistic physics models, more expansive and interactive environments, genres blending into a more complete and lifelike experience, and so on. The trend will likely continue this way, with less dramatic but nonetheless important improvements continuing to move gaming forward, a little at a time. For example, there's no real comparison in gameplay between *NFS: Hot Pursuit* and *Gran Turismo 3*. Likewise, we challenge you to find a game world from even two years ago as complete or responsive as that found in *Shenmue*. For the record, we'd love to see more genre-busting, but publishers will continue to gravitate toward known gaming types (racing games, fighting games, RPGs, etc.) as long as people continue to buy them.

➔ I was recently bringing back some good memories by playing *Metal Gear Solid*, and I noticed something odd. I was fighting Psycho Mantis when all of a sudden the entire screen of my TV goes black and in the top right hand corner is the word "Hideo." Now I know that Hideo Kojima is the creator of the series, and I was just wondering if this is some weird glitch or if he purposely placed it in the game. I know you guys can get to the bottom of this so thanks for your help!

"JayTheFF"
Via email

Um, that's not a glitch — it's part of the game. Theoretically, at that moment Psycho Mantis is taking control of your PlayStation and generally causing mayhem with your home system. "Hideo" is doubtless just a play on words with "video," as if Mantis were switching the

SMALL ISSUE ISSUES

➔ I have come to the conclusion that humanity is doomed. I have found another trend to add to the epidemics of shrinking rain-forest, shrinking ozone layer, and shrinking economy. It is the epidemic of shrinking magazines! Imagine my shock when I discovered that **NG 05/01** was 12% narrower and 23% lighter than the **04/01** issue from one month before! **Next Gen** lost 17.5% of its mass in one month! If this trend continues then by October, **Next Gen** will be the size of a fortune cookie! What happened to the days when publications had backbone? The *Encyclopedia Britannica* has been around for decades and it only gets bigger! Is this a sign of inter-publication predation? Please tell me everything will be all right so I can stop sleeping in my Y2K bunker.

Mik Garber
Via email

Hey, what's going on? First your mag was the standard 8" x 11", then it went wider... now the May issue is back to 8" x 11". Is someone playing mindgames with the printer, or has Tom Russo made up his mind? Also, a gripe: You used to

print the ratings on all games in back of your issues, and this was extremely handy when going out to purchase games. I could take your magazine along to remind me which ones to avoid. (Believe it or not, I trust your judgment.) Any chance of putting it back in?

G. Vincent
Via email

There's really not much we could do about the change to a smaller book size; we loved the larger format, but the change came for several reasons — none of them aesthetic, we assure you. Mostly it was rising paper and production costs. The industry as a whole is rather strapped for cash at the moment — and our advertisers will be the first to tell you, the shortage of PS2s wasn't just a problem for gamers who couldn't find one. The *Gamer's Guide* is a different situation. With so much happening with the launch of GameCube and Xbox, we feel it's better to use the space reporting on new games, instead of rehashing the scores of old ones. Still, we plan to include it when we can — like, for example, this month.



■ Issues shown to scale — no you did not imagine that Next Gen got smaller



inputs on your TV. And yes, that would make it a Kojima in-joke.

➔ First I'd like to say this: I consider myself a hardcore gamer. I own a Dreamcast and a PS2 — both of which I bought on launch day — and I plan to get an Xbox the minute it hits the shelves too. I am not biased in any way, although I do love my Dreamcast. But I recently saw the release list for PS2 and noticed that *Metal Gear Solid 2* was scheduled for October, around the same time Xbox is supposed to hit. It got me thinking. If Sony

repeats with Xbox what they did with Dreamcast (releasing *FFVII* on 9/9/99, the day Dreamcast was launched), by releasing *MG2* and *FFIX* on or around the Xbox launch date, then they could seriously hurt Xbox. Look at what happened to Dreamcast.

Ariel A. Ventura
Via email

Well, you can't expect Sony to

just do nothing while the competition rolls out their new consoles and games, now can you? But it is worth noting that, in the U.S. at least, Dreamcast sold just fine at launch, and indeed for the whole of that holiday season. It was a lack of sales in Japan and Sega's massive debt that eventually killed Dreamcast, not *FFVII*.



Next Generation Letters,
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Email us: ngonline@imaginemedia.com
Note: email is vastly, vastly preferred

July 1985

A lowly plumber begins reconstruction of the console industry

→ Apple and Commodore were leading the PC market through a banner year in 1985, when the parade of classic releases included Origin's *AutoDuel*, Firebird's *Elite* (the C-64 version — a BBC Electron version had shipped in Europe in 1984), and EA's *The Bard's Tale*.

The console market, however, was still reeling from the industry crash of the early '80s. Atari had killed its planned 7800 console and had refocused on the personal computer market. Intellivision was on life support, and Coleco, surviving only because of the uncanny popularity of Cabbage Patch Kids, pulled the plug on ADAM.

Then there was Nintendo, which had been unable to convince Atari to release its Famicom console in the U.S. Nintendo made a prophetic decision to bring



■ Classics like *Elite* kept computer gaming alive, but it took NES to revive the console industry

Famicom — ultimately renamed the Nintendo Entertainment System — to the U.S. themselves. It hit shelves in New York in time for Christmas, meeting with huge success, revitalizing console sales and even prompting Atari to resurrect the 7800 for release in 1986. NES would come to be known as the savior of the industry.

IN-DEPTH REPORT! JOYSTICKS VS. GAMEPADS: WHICH IS BETTER?

→ NextGen

Too little, Too late?

NINTENDO ENTERTAINMENT SYSTEM

Nintendo's upcoming console looks great. But does anybody care?

PLUS:
SUPER MARIO BROS.

NINTENDO'S SECRET WEAPON MAY BE THE BEST GAME YOU'LL EVER PLAY

40+
GAMES
REVIEWED

Beach Head 2 C-64
Mail Order Monsters C-64
Winter Games C-64
Starflight PC
Ghosts 'n Goblins Arcade
Hang On Arcade

Atari 5200 ■ ColecoVision ■ Intellivision ■ Apple II ■ C-64



What we were playing

Consoles were hibernating, but arcades and computers were wide-awake

■ GAUNTLET



■ Platform: Arcade
■ Publisher: Atari

■ THE BARD'S TALE



■ Platform: C-64
■ Publisher: Electronic Arts

■ MAT MANIA



■ Platform: Arcade
■ Publisher: Taito

■ SPACE HARRIER



■ Platform: Arcade
■ Publisher: Sega

■ SUPER MARIO BROS.



■ Platform: NES
■ Publisher: Nintendo

1985 Prime Time Schedules

Thursday	8:00	8:30	9:00	9:30	10:00
ABC	People Do the Craziest Things	Who's the Boss?	Glitter		20/20
CBS	Magnum PI		Simon & Simon		Knot's Landing
NBC	The Cosby Show	Family Ties	Cheers	Night Court	Hill St. Blues
Friday	8:00	8:30	9:00	9:30	10:00
ABC	Benson	Webster	Hawaiian Heat		Matt Houston
CBS	The Dukes of Hazzard		Dallas		Falcon Crest
NBC	V		Hunter		Miami Vice

...and in the real world

■ Orson Welles, the Hollywood legend, whose 1938 radio broadcast of *The War of the Worlds* terrified listeners who didn't know it was fake, and whose 1941 classic *Citizen Kane* is regarded as the greatest film ever made, dies at age 70. A vote among friends to bury him with a sled fails by a very narrow margin.

■ The first general-interest CD-ROM is released in the form of *Grollier's Interactive Encyclopedia*. Though the encyclopedia contains a staggering 9 million words, it takes up a mere 12% of the CD-ROM's vast storage capacity.

■ Piano man Billy Joel somehow marries uptown girl Christie Brinkley, giving millions of

working-class men the hope that they, too, could wed a super-model.

■ The Chicago Bears win Super Bowl XX by a score of 46-10 over the New England Patriots, setting a Super Bowl record for the widest margin of victory. Ironically, the Bears' Walter Payton, the NFL's all-time leading rusher, doesn't score a touchdown in the game.

■ Live Aid raises \$70 million dollars to aid famine victims in Africa. The event is dubbed a huge success but fails to result in fame for organizer Bob Geldof's band, the Boomtown Rats — perhaps because, owing to his appearance in the film *The Wall*, half the world still thinks Geldof's real name is Pink Floyd.

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This month, Blake "Mr. Urkenny" Fischer gets drafted to do the funny little test... A shout out and a swig of malt liquor to the former staff of Daily Raster. Come visit and you too can witness the splendors of the Commodore gaming lounge/boutique. Games we're playing this issue: Street Fighter Alpha 2, Tony Hawk GBA, and Serious Sam. And Eric "Mr. Car" Smith would like to add 1901 Checker Marlin for sale — now with brains!



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BackwardsCompatible

Embarrassing home movies or signs of genius? Maybe a little of both. Page 31. The first, and doubtless last, time we will ever reference the Village People. Page 86. **Will this game ever make it to the U.S.? We sure hope so. Page 43.** Try to say the subtitle for the PS2 *Heroes of Might and Magic* game without chuckling. We couldn't. Page 82. **Well, let's just hope that Congress never sees this game and just continues to parade Night Trap and Mortal Kombat around. Page 36.** It wasn't us that got bigger, it was the magazines that got small... Page 93. **Picabo Street in a combat game? An idea so crazy, it just might work... Page 87.** We'd just like to assure you that this man is not angry because of the fact that you have to use the gamepad. Really — it just looks that way. Page 24. **Eventually, the people who make these facilities will devise some sort of escape plan for when everything escapes. Won't they? Page 45.** Six TVs, six PS2s — doesn't everybody have that? Page 79. **The most aptly titled Star Wars game ever? You decide. Page 83.** They're not Jet Skis, they're "watercraft," dammit! Page 40. **A further sign the Apocalypse is nigh: A Myst game we actually liked. Page 89.** Giving new meaning to the term "rabid baseball fan," Page 84. **No, we're not referring to Lee Van Cleef. Page 38.**

NextMonth Dead to Rights



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